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PCZONE

ISSUE 220 JUNE 2010



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F.E.A.R.

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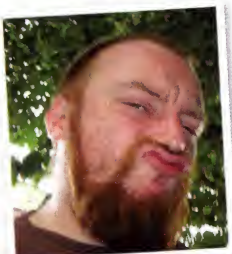
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Full offer details on page 60.

Meet The Team

The shocking bunch responsible for this mess



JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Freelance

AGE Young at heart

LIKES Being liked

DISLIKES Being disliked

FANCIES Wine

FAVOURITE GAME PacMan

NOW PLAYING Assassin's Creed II

Now a part-time full-timer, Jon 'Log' Blyth now phases in and out of existence in the **PC ZONE** office like the following pop culture references: Captain Janeway in the *Voyager* episode where the transporter is on the blink. Jacob in the second series of *Lost*. Marty McFly in *Back to the Future* when his parents almost weren't going to do it. He's like our very own ginger TARDIS, making satisfying whooshing noises to herald his own arrival in our dimension. God bless you, Log.

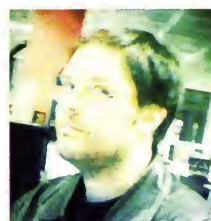


STEVE HOGARTY

Boss hog

Unable to go home for St Patrick's day, Steve dressed in green, and downed huge amounts of Guinness, potatoes and soda bread, while reciting *Father Ted* scenes instead.

NOW PLAYING: *Just Cause 2*



DAVID BROWN

Staff Writer

As a major league metalhead David asked Sports Interactive to add a Soilent Green soundtrack to *Football Manager Live*. Their response: "Er... who?"

NOW PLAYING: *Mass Effect 2*



NICK BRAKESPEAR

Freelancer

This month, Nick made his own hat-based expansion for *Dragon Age: Origins*. What are the chances? A milliner-to-one.

NOW PLAYING: *Dragon Age: Origins*

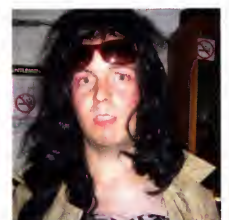


ALEC MEER

Freelancer

A recent game of rock, paper, scissors with Alec ended with him falling limply to the floor and gurgling as if we'd made a crude, veiled reference to his other job.

NOW PLAYING: *Chaos Rising*

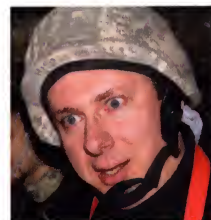


WILL PORTER

Freelancer

Once the editor of a prestigious magazine, Will now specialises in lectures on middleware, pole-dancers and inebriation.

NOW PLAYING: *Assassin's Creed II*



STEVE HILL

Freelancer

This man can't go into an MMO without being mobbed by fans. And by 'mobbed' we mean 'lynched' and by 'fans' we mean devs he's insulted.

NOW PLAYING: *PKR*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... an extra hour of daylight brings us one step closer to cider in the park.
WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... a string of Burger King meals brings us one step closer to a coronary.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

ALAN TITCHMARSH 13min The rumple-faced ex-gardener takes daytime telly to new lows

VIDEOGAME BAFTAS 1min No Kanye-style interruptions, shamefully.

TAX BREAK 1min We await the unveiling of Ubisoft Basildon with bated breath...

GDC 4min Living vicariously through Will Porter is a dangerous occupation

BAD EXCUSES 2min "My bus driver got lost." "There were horses on the track." "I couldn't find any of my clothes."

WORSE EXCUSES 3min "I was trapped in the past." "I was, briefly, the president of a small island nation."

FOR SALE: SYRINGE 1min Syringe that allegedly killed Michael Jackson is for sale. Only £3.3million

IN THE HEAD 3min Chinese gamer accused of cheating is knifed in the head. A fair punishment?

ALIEN VS POOH 2min Yes, That Alien and that bear: godxiliary.com/alienvspoo

TALKING SHIT 2,000min We've been bored.

WIN!



HOW TO ENTER Text TINY followed by your answer, name and email address to 87474; or send your answer, name, post address and phone number to: Tiny Compz, PC ZONE Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, Luton, NN1 6NW, or by email to letters@pczone.co.uk (set TINY COMPO as the subject). The winner will be picked at random from all correct entries and will receive a copy of *Ghostbusters: The Video Game*. The winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your normal network tariff. By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about products and services which may be of interest to you. If you do not want to receive this, include the word "STOP" at the end of your text or postal entry.

TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before 11 May 2010 will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility can't be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK, employees of Future or its affiliates, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. 9. Entrants must be 18 years or over. Full conditions: snipurl.com/futuretcs

PCZONE

Contents

In this issue of the UK's best PC mag...

F-THREE-AY-AR

BABIES. TERRIFYING LITTLE factories of stink. Small girls. Hauntingly ever-present, and clearly plotting our demise from behind all that lank, greasy hair. Old hags. Flailing and angry after so many years of rejection and loneliness. *F.3.A.R.* is constructing a cast of the most heinous horror villains imaginable.

But what's truly terrifying (not really, but let me punch you with the melodrama all the same) is the flippancy with which publishers are naming their sequels. This'll be the first of about five mentions of *F.3.A.R.*'s nonsense name you'll read - unless you're reading back to front like some sort of psychopath - but it's really worth stressing the point. It looks awful, jarring and stupid.

Preferable, though still rubbish, would be the more classic *Game Name: The Subtitle* construction. Or the unoriginal but, more importantly, not ridiculous method of putting the number after the game's name. We know, having whispered it down the phone to our mums (who we tell about all the secret new games), that it's pronounced *F.E.A.R.* 3, so that's how you'll see it displayed everywhere in the mag from now on. Except in headlines, because, as I've come to learn in my tenure as *Zone*'s editor, that's a special and wonderful place with its own special rules. 3njoy th3 m4g.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty
Acting Editor
steve.hogarty@futurenet.com

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COVER STORY

F.3.A.R.

Alma's back, and this time she's got a bun in the over. A bun that heralds the death of humanity, but you can't hate a baby. Right?

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THE SECRET WORLD

The Old Republic now has a rival for the Most Wanted MMO crown.



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MAFIA II



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TRUE CRIME



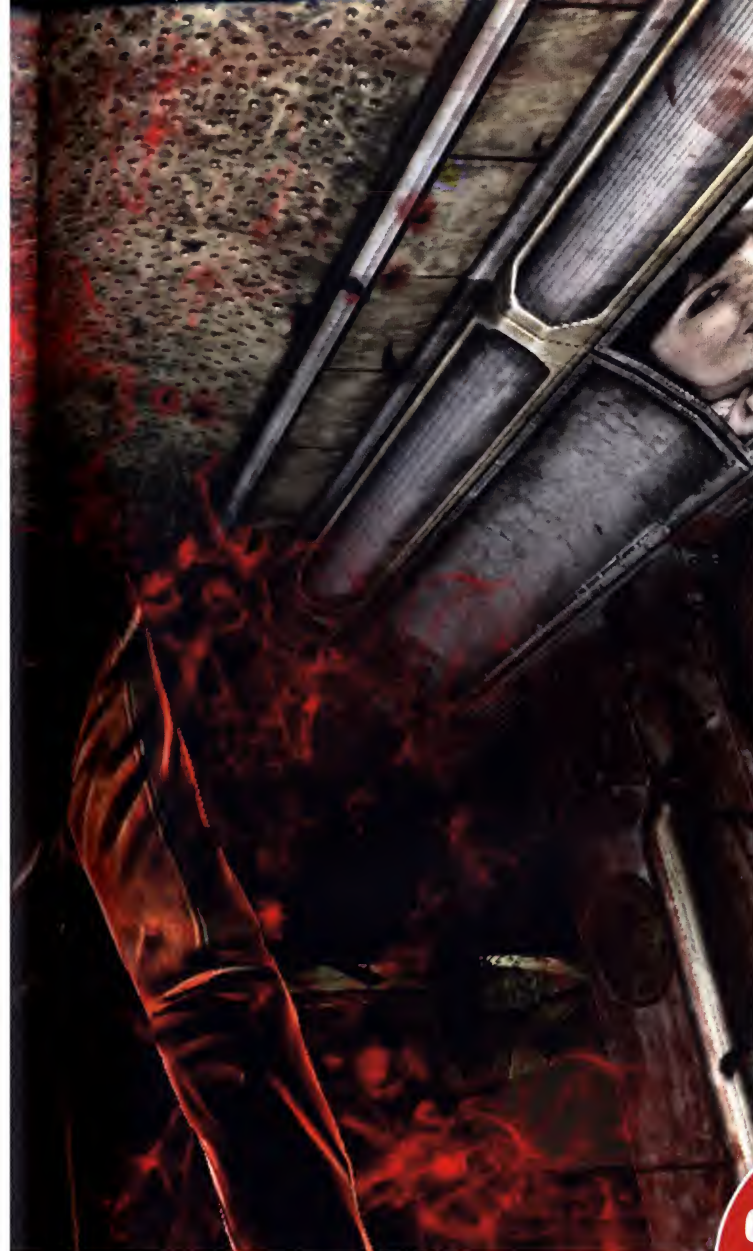
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METRO 2033

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CLUB!



WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



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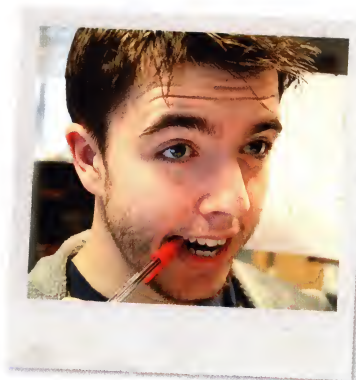
Too busy? PC ZONE in 73 words...
This month we heading to the land of Vertigo, Tales of the City, Bullitt and Nash Bridges to take a look at what the year holds for we gamers. We also got royally drunk and hung out with strippers, but that's not unusual. Apart from our massive preview section, we have Kane's death blow, Moscovian nightmares, big metal tubes, more dragons, naughty marines, and a pile of stuff that isn't so exciting. Sorry.

110 FREWARE

This month: love over a modem, trim hedges, spell with physics letters, fly planes, and play with sheep.

Letters

Steve Hogarty braves a deluge of digital correspondence, and for what? This?



KING OF LETTERS

AMPUTEE-TIME

For as long as I can remember, your *PC ZONE* Around the World feature has been just that. You ask for inappropriate, and all you get is "I knew my holiday would be shit, so took my *PC ZONE* to keep me occupied".

So with this in mind I thought: if you want inappropriate, then that's what you shall have, so I got the wife to take this pic of me the day I had my leg amputated. Hope this does qualify me to appear.

Jason Hudson

We've been holding off printing this letter for so long that your leg's probably grown back by now, with extra strength, a cocky attitude and +1 resistance to further amputations – such is our understanding of the human body.

Readers, Jason's raised the bar for inappropriate *PC ZONE* Around the World photos, so much so that we've had to make him King of Letters. Time to up your game!



WIN!

This month the monarch of the Letters pages will receive two prizes: an ATI Radeon HD 5750 graphics card, and a copy of *Colin McRae: Dirt 2*, thanks to our pals at AMD. The HD 5750 is part of a new breed of powerful GPUs that are compatible with DirectX 11. And *Dirt 2* is the perfect game to see what DX11 is really capable of.

BEAT THE DRM

So, when I read about the outrageous DRM in *Assassin's Creed II* I thought you guys would be all over it, that you'd support the legitimate customer and tell

Ubisoft of the error of their silly ways. Sadly, my naive optimism was dashed. "To admonish a publisher for including inconvenient DRM would be irresponsible and misrepresentative," thundered the editor, "it's our job to inform and warn," he raged.

So I turn to Log's review, thinking he'll stand up and tell it like it is. But no.

"Cloud save games," he writes, "no disc play and no install limits, see? It's not all kicks in the dick, Ubisoft loves you really."

So far, so patronised. But I suppose it's more diplomatic than telling a major games company (who may or may not invite certain games journos overseas to show off new games) that their DRM is the most appalling draconian rubbish – which will inconvenience no one except legitimate paying customers –

effectively excludes anyone with a poor internet connection, and that far from preventing piracy, it will serve only to dramatically increase it.

However, as *PC ZONE* policy seems to be leave intestinal fortitude at the front door we should not be entirely surprised. I've no doubt the game is brilliant, but the DRM is a massive part of that game. And for you brave journalists to obfuscate and pussyfoot around it as you have does you no credit. Poor show gentlemen.

Lee Curran

The Ubisoft DRM controversy came to light as we finished issue 219, and in the interim some of our grievances have been mitigated. It's still too soon to do anything more than be explicit in our



Silent bastion of all
 that is right on PC.
 Despite server issues.



"I played *Bad Company 2* and all was where it was supposed to be"

description of how the DRM affects you, and we certainly can't allow it to impact on the game's score, if only because I predict that this DRM will have changed entirely in about six month's time.

Rest assured though, that the sum total of our resistance to Ubisoft's masterplan is not a childish snipe in an editorial and a tongue-in-cheek back page. We've a full investigation into DRMgate coming up in issue 221, in which Will Porter discovers that Ubisoft are, as we all predicted, in league with Beelzebub himself.

EVERYTHING'S GOOD

So there I was, beginning to lose faith in the development of PC games, beginning to think that some of the big games designers were missing opportunities for epic PC titles.

Why no multiplayer in *Mirror's Edge*? Rooftop chases, slow-motion gunplay and melee combat. Why wasn't *Operation Flashpoint 2* as good as it should have been? Why no dedicated servers for *Modern Warfare 2*? But then some things happened: *Mass Effect 2* wasn't dumbed down for the consoles; *BioShock 2* was actually better than the first game; *Heroes of*

Newerth is mind-bendingly awesome; multiplayer has been announced for *Assassin's Creed III*; and then I played *Battlefield: Bad Company 2*, and everything was where it was supposed to be.

Jack Mason

Now there's the sort of optimism we just don't get in our letters pages any

more. And you're right too, a boatload of PC-considerate titles have arrived lately, but we're all too busy shitting in envelopes and posting them off to French publishers to notice. Let's see how long we can maintain this glorious wave of positivity.

MOAN ON SUNDAY

Despite the years of spot on reviews, laughs and off the wall (but not self-indulgent) articles, I can safely say the single most uplifting moment that *PC ZONE* has

YOUR SHOUT!

SEND US YOUR REVIEWS
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ASSASSIN'S CREED II

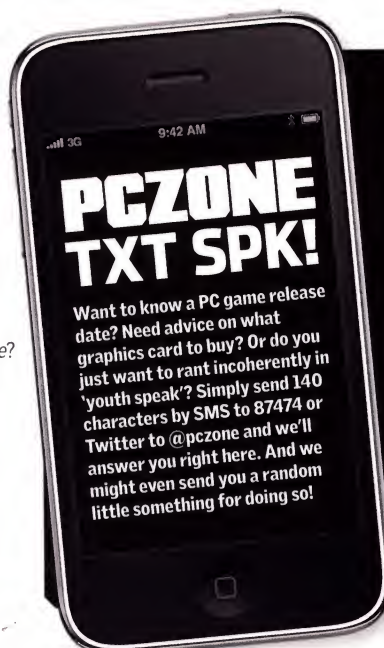
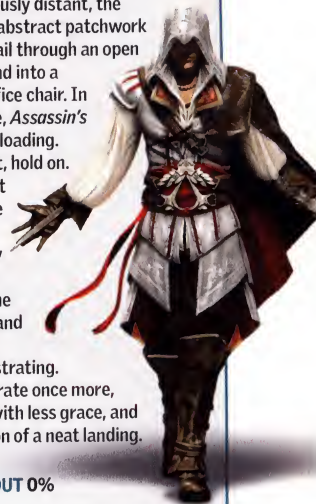
Vauxhall Whitcut
 PC ZONE SCORE 90%

The muscles in my legs tense in the final half-second before I leave the ledge, launching myself in a graceful arc through the warm summer air. My cape flutters in the breeze as I reach the zenith of my leap, the ledge now deliriously distant, the ground an abstract patchwork of tiles. I sail through an open window, and into a waiting office chair. In front of me, *Assassin's Creed II* is loading.

Oh wait, hold on. The Ubisoft servers are down. So I can't play the single-player game I paid for, and it really is rather frustrating. I defenestrate once more, this time with less grace, and no intention of a neat landing.

YOUR SHOUT 0%

Send your reviews with a maximum of 120 words, your name and a score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.



Any idea if there is going to be a new *Far Cry*?
Hayden Morris

We'd guess: yes. But as for where it'd be set? We've no idea. Where would you like to see the series go?

What comes after *Napoleon: Total War*?
Marvin

Louis XVIII: Total War, presumably.

Flotilla, why have you not reviewed it?
Tom

We bloody have. Go look.

Just Cause 2 is very good. More more!
Henry W.

We're not sure that's how sequels work...



Text your PC game-related nonsense to 87474, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leave a space, and continue with your text - and don't forget your name. Texts should be no more than 160 characters long.

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➤ delivered was provided by Log's infiltration of the *Mail on Sunday* and the revelation that those that write it know it's all a load of pony droppings. Thank God – my faith in humanity immediately rose 50%.

So there's a bit of soul-selling going on but that's human nature, like swearing for emphasis or never making it farther than a pub within spitting distance for work drinks.

How about an inside scoop on politicians next, though perhaps there's a limit to how much soul selling is acceptable? At least your mum would be impressed though.

TheWatcher1001

So it's settled, Log's next mission is to infiltrate the British National Party and reveal that, despite all of the evidence and video footage and interviews and reports and facts, they're not actually a pile of racist xenophobes and are, in fact, just being really ironic.

THE FLESH BOAT

Women in games, eh? How about those women. In games. I don't understand the sartorially distorted world they're living in. Why, for example, do all their tops stop a few inches above their bellybuttons? And start a few inches above their nips? I can think of only two

exceptions: Alma and Alyx. Otherwise it's off on the flesh boat for the rest of them, calling at Tittytown and Tummyville. I won't be happy until Max Payne's balls are hanging out.

Cecilia Woman

Very true.

OFF THE FLESH BOAT

In response to Cecilia Woman's letter (above), it's not just women being ogled in virtual worlds. If you'd turn your attention away from the PC for and towards the children's console the Nintendo Wii, you'll find a wealth of steroid abusing men parading around in thongs in *Muscle March*. I've attached a picture so that *PC ZONE* will print it. They have to, as it forms part of my legally binding 'right to reply'.

Johnny Bloke

He's right, you know. Pictures like this level the playing field.

PAY-TO-WIN

EA's rash decision to change the in-game pricing system in *Battlefield Heroes* is a bad one for many of us players. It means we non-paying players have to play five hours a day to get enough Valor Points (the free-to-play alternative to real money) to rent



MYSTIC WILL'S SERIAL KILLER

Give me your codes,
I will dispense prophecy

Dear Mystic Will,
I found this mystic code inscribed on a game manual, and now my cats refuse to come near me. Do you have any idea what it might mean, and if it foretells some sort of prophecy?

P7WB-TB723-HWIC-IBX4-WLTG
Ryan King

I bring your attention to the penultimate lexical quadrology, IBX4, which could only refer to an Ibex of the Capra genus: a sure-footed mountain goat. As foretold by the serial key: four of them will visit to teach you a life affirming lesson. WLTG, then, can only mean "Will listen to goats".

Have you got a mystic serial key you'd like Mystic Will to divine? Then send it into letters@pczone.co.uk. Readings are guaranteed 100% accurate.

a single weapon for one day. Meanwhile, buyers who spend at least double that of a normal game in the shops run around with their fancy clothes and big-ass weapons.

How can EA expect non-paying players to be happy? The game's still buggy and forums are crowded with issues that never seemed to get fixed. So much for free-to-play, now it's more like free-to-die-by-a-buyer-who-spends.

Sam Clusker

You're absolutely right, EA got greedy with *Battlefield Heroes*. But can't you just be happy about the bit where the soldiers sit on the wings of planes?



Everything that's
wrong with people.

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



We want photos of you with *PC ZONE* in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!



Tian Tian

Long Long



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COVER STORY

F.3.A.R.



WE ADMIT WE felt a bit queasy by the end of *FEAR 2*: if the buckets of half-congealed claret didn't send your stomach on a pilgrimage to your gob, then the scene in which Alma hops on board the hero's cock-train and rides him halfway to hell would do the trick. What disturbs us this time around however is the flagrant abuse of punctuation happening in the game title. Just when we thought we'd gotten used to the faux-bbreviation of the first two games, Warner come along and replace an 'E' with a '3'. That 'E' used to mean 'Encounter', guys. Now it means nothing. First Three Assault Recon? No, no this doesn't make sense at all. The confusion abates on page 62.

PAGE

62

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the **world of PC gaming**
**SECRET
WORLDS**
Steve Hogarty

S O GDC HAS been and gone, and we're left mopping the floors as the last game announcements stumble out the front door, drunk on publicity and falling into unlicensed minicabs, which is something you should never ever do.

I operated Will Porter from afar, like the bad guy in *Mass Effect 2*, metaphorically assuming control of his body as he went "behind closed doors" to see *F.3.A.R.*, before relinquishing control as he was made to stare at German turn-based strategy games.

My game of the show (the show I was 5,370 miles away from) is *The Secret World*, Funcom's MMO set in the real world and beset by zombies and other conspiracy-bound ghouls. *Age of Conan* did the studio few favours – though it's relatively successful, and expecting an expansion in *Rise of the Godslayer* – and had them retreating slightly from their lofty ambitions after a drop-off in users. But *The Secret World* makes use of Funcom's greatest asset – the one evident in their pre-*AoC* catalogue – writing.

Now unshackled from a licence, they can do whatever they like with their MMO's world, hopefully introducing a new standard of storytelling to the genre. Is that too optimistic? Probably, but between *The Secret World* and *The Old Republic*, change is definitely on the horizon for the defiantly stagnant, money-churning genre. The further we can get from fantasy the better. All that MMO rumination starts over on page 50.

GOD COMPLEX

Elves, dwarves and plenty of turns to be taken in *Disciples III: Renaissance*

DEVELOPER .dat PUBLISHER Strategy First WEBSITE disciples3.ru ETA Summer 2010

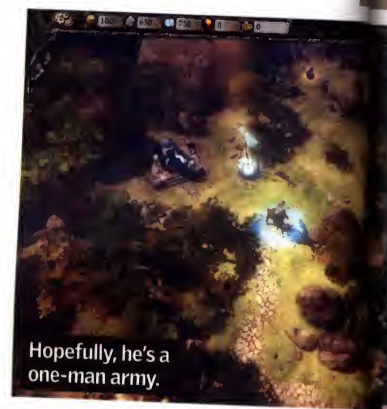
FIRST THING YOU want to know about a fantasy game is whether the Elves get their assets out for the lads. Well, it seems that in *Disciples III: Renaissance*, there is more than enough flesh to suit even the most skin-obsessed player.

There's also a unicorn in it, so the developers are also concerned with other niche pornographic markets as well. However, they're mainly concerned with one more subsection of society, one that's even more depraved and isolated than unicorn fanciers: turn-based strategy gamers.

Perhaps more people will join their hunched, shadowed ranks when

Disciples III comes out, for it might just be that game to make turn-based strategy funky again. The game will be the latest in a venerated series, giving players the chance to control three different playable races. First off there's the Empire (humans), then come the Legions of the Damned (evil humans), finally the Elven Alliance (elves and maybe some walking trees and forest animals or something). Also, in a bid to win over new players, the battle system will be completely revamped from what we've seen before.

In these skirmishes, every army needs a hero or leader, so that's exactly what you'll get. These bastions of good/



Hopefully, he's a one-man army.

evil/green clothing will be highly customisable, his or her armour and weapon changes being reflected in real-time on their character models, which is always a welcome touch.

As for the plot, the land of Nevendaar is being threatened, due to the Highfather (basically God) not bothering looking after it any more. A mysterious messenger from the heavens called Inoelle, who's an angel of some sort, takes up the torch of freedom against the forces of evil. On her journey, she discovers new emotions that previously were unknown to her, like love, patriotism and a fondness for Pot Noodles.

Other leaders she might meet along the way are Lambert, a supreme commander of the Imperial Guard, a demonic warrior called Haarhus and, finally, an elf called Erion, who's probably handy with a bow. It's all shaping up to be one of those sleeper titles that you might just find yourself interested in because of the slew of ridiculous third-person action games blighting the release schedules with their monotony. **PC**

"Might just be that game to make turn-based strategy funky again"



Someone call an electrician.

**STOP
PRESS!**

CRASHERS

Late 2010 will bring online multiplayer funtimes with *Crashers*, a mash-up of *Twisted Metal* and the ill-fated and utterly dead *Auto Assault*.

LEAVE THE LIGHT ON

Online multiplayer funtimes are to be had with the recently announced *Blacklight: Tango Down*. Keep an eye on it over at playtangodown.com

HANDBALL, REF!

If you're a fan of handball you should check out the excitingly titled *Handball Challenge Training Camp*. Get the demo here: handball-challenge.com

36

DEAD RISING 2

Yet more zombies! Bet you can't wait, right? So rejoice!



54

SECRET WORLD

The monster hunting MMO is coming.



62

F.3.A.R.

The worst pregnancy ever. Even *EastEnders* wouldn't go here.



Well, I'd rear up if I saw those two.



268

STUFF

You might not have heard the name Robert Culp, but we're willing to bet you've been unwittingly captivated by his incredible vocal performances. Culp won awards alongside Bill Cosby in *I Spy* and appeared in a range of quality shows and films, including a few memorable *Columbo* episodes. To *PC ZONE* he's best known as the voice of silver-haired opportunist and totalitarian dictator Dr Breen in *Half-Life 2*. Sadly, Culp passed away on 24 March, bringing his fantastic work as perhaps the *Half-Life* series' most affective and emotive actor to an end.

"...and then we had a great bread-and-butter – hey, shouldn't we be fighting?"

**LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER**

GOOD TIMES



We open the work experience floodgates for a fraction of a moment, allowing two of the things to rush into the office.



It's cheaper to put him down, and our publisher says we can get a new one if we meet all our deadlines.

ON THE FENCE



They're fighting constantly, and we're forced to keep them in separate cages until they get used to one another's scents.

BAD TIMES



One of them has developed an infected foot, after we neglected to change his bedding one weekend.



The vet says he'll need an urgent operation. As we're not insured, it'll cost us over £4,000.

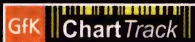
IT BEGINS AGAIN

SHIT! HOW LONG LEFT?

DEADLINE

PCZONE Charts

Official data compiled by

**1 NEW COMMAND & CONQUER 4: TIBERIAN TWILIGHT**
Issue 220 - 60%**2 NEW DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS - AWAKENING**
Issue 220 - 79%**3 NEW BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2**
Issue 220 - 84%**4 FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010**
Issue 214 - 88%**5 NEW DAWN OF WAR II: CHAOS RISING**
Issue 220 - 90%**6 NEW NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR**
Issue 220 - 89%**7 NEW METRO 2033**
Issue 220 - 80%**8 THE SIMS 3**
Issue 208 - 92%**9 LEFT 4 DEAD 2**
Issue 215 - 94%**10 THE SIMS 3: WORLD ADVENTURES**
Issue 215 - 78%**11 NEW SUPREME COMMANDER 2**
Issue 219 - 80%**12 ASSASSIN'S CREED II**
Issue 219 - 90%**13 ALIENS VS PREDATOR**
Issue 218 - 82%**14 MODERN WARFARE 2**
Issue 215 - 95%**15 WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF LICH KING**
Issue 202 - 86%**16 DAWN OF WAR II - GOLD**
N/A**17 DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS**
Issue 214 - 93%**18 MASS EFFECT 2**
Issue 218 - 93%**19 EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR**
Issue 206 - 78%**20 NEW THE STRONGHOLD: COLLECTION**
N/A**9. LEFT 4 DEAD 2**Valve's co-op shooter is still popular, more so that *Aliens vs Predator*, which has slipped and tumbled away.**12. ASSASSIN'S CREED II**It's *Assassin's Creed*, without the crap bits. Lots of stabbing goodness. (Not that we like knives. Knives are bad.)**16. DAWN OF WAR II - GOLD**This packs *DOW2* and *Chaos Rising* into one box. Lots of Space Marine goodness and Chaossilation.**20. THE STRONGHOLD: COLLECTION**Five *Stronghold* games in one box. A huge amount of castling goodness.

Vote for me, or get a Batarang to the head.



She likely eats puppy dog tails.

OPEN SEASON

Voting for the 2010 Golden Joystick Awards nominations opens soon

WEBSITE goldenjoystick.com**SEASONS CHANGE, GOVERNMENTS**

fall, but one thing remains constant: a Golden Joystick Award is still the most prestigious prize in the gaming world. And now you can have your say about which games get shortlisted for the 28th Golden Joystick Awards this year when long list voting opens on 4 May.

Any game released in the last 12 months is eligible, and this year the categories have been changed so that instead of each platform having its own Best Game award, you can now vote for your favourite game in each genre. *BioShock 2* for the Best Shooter? *Batman: Arkham Asylum* for the Best Action Adventure? *NBA 2K10* for the Best Sports game? Whatever you want, it's entirely up to you.

Long list voting closes on 1 June so you haven't got a massive amount of

time to pick the games you want to see on the shortlists, so why not close down the porn website you're secretly perusing and type goldenjoystick.com into your URL area to cast your votes and help get your favourite games one step closer to earning one of those precious trophies. Then you can go back to the pornography, happy that you've done your duty by your favourite game. The developers would thank you for it and believe us, they'll all know how hard it is to drag yourself away from those MILFs, you dirty scoundrels.

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Tim Ingham (CVG's editor), Julie Peasgood (hypocritic/sex woman), and Kelvin McKenzie (ex-tabloid editor).

UNPOPULAR ACTRESS HATES THINGS

Hypocrite Julie Peasgood joins forces with soil-fingered menace to attack videogames

GAMES WILL ALWAYS be misunderstood. There's that partly-excusable and dwindling group: people who've never played games and wrongly imagine them to be context-free episodes of meaningless sadism. But that less culpable group are responsible for the existence of the obnoxious second: publicity hungry pundits and politicians, who'll say anything to get them into the papers, or win votes.

"The implication was, as it always is, drugs and games are equivalent"

Take Julie Peasgood – a tabloid sexpert who was willing to extend her area of authority to include videogames on *The Alan Titchmarsh Show*, on which she proudly proclaimed she was "categorically against violence for entertainment" and boldly claimed that they promoted racism and depression. The Home Counties crowd might have applauded less enthusiastically had they

known about her role in horror video game, *Martian Gothic: Unification*.

A recent study was brought up that proves children playing violent video games were more aggressive, but the relevance of the study is lessened when you rephrase it "Children playing video games they're not legally allowed to buy suffer ill effects."

This brings us back to the point CVG online editor Tim Ingham constantly, and heroically, reiterated: we already

have a perfectly adequate ratings system for games in place.

But it's not just backwash nan-TV that's at it: that same weekend, the *Observer Magazine* ran a feature called *What Video Games Do To Us*. Rather than being a study of what videogames do to us, it was the story of one man who took a pile of cocaine and played *Grand Theft Auto IV* for a month. The



story was illustrated with pictures of "real gamers", gurning and ugly.

The implication was, as it always is, drugs and games are equivalent. They hook you in, fill your brain, and leave you grotesque and useless. It's simplistic, manipulative and misleading, wilfully replacing data with a single anecdote. And lost in this whole discussion are the 95% of games that are suitable for children. Pippa Funnell, anyone?

So after a depressingly predictable couple of weeks, it was refreshing to get some good news. As part of the budget, Alistair Darling introduced tax breaks for home-grown videogames. The government now recognises not only that videogames are a legitimate

industry, but also that they carry some artistic merit worthy of subsidy.

You could argue that the last place that needs a tax break is Rockstar North – but chief executive of trade lobbyist group TIGA explains that the break will pay for itself, with the creation of thousands of graduate-level jobs, greater investment in the industry, and increased output leading eventually to more revenue for the government. Maybe, maybe not – but being offered the same incentives as the movie industry is certainly a sign that the government isn't being led by the screams from Peasgood's floss-haired army of idiots.

It's just a shame that it takes a multi-billion dollar industry to make people see that. **PCZ**

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UPFRONT **INCOMING**

Incoming

How you'll be wasting your money in 2010

AS WE MOVE further into the year, there's only so much excitement we can spread about before things get sticky and disgusting. We have to conserve our anticipation goo for worthy receptacles, so it's both a pain and a pleasure to see so many great titles be announced at GDC, which you can read about starting on page 40.

Suffice it to say, we're looking forward to crying out in unadulterated ecstasy as we click through the *Monkey Island 2* remake and fumble with our trousers as *F1 2010*'s parents come home early and catch us in a compromising position with their game daughter. As for the other harlots looking to occupy our time, see the exhaustive and accurate (for now) list below.

SPLIT/SECOND

We took a shine to this one last month when we saw it in action. It looked rough around the edges, being only an early build that was in action, but it was clear to see that high octane thrills were bursting out of the screen like multi-coloured facehuggers, shoving phallic pipes down our game gullets and infecting us with enthusiasm. It's taken a while for these feelings to gestate properly, but soon we'll know if the excitedly screaming alien that's preparing itself in our stomachs is a keeper, or one to

toss absent-mindedly into the bin of discarded hopes and dreams. Er, and by that we mean we'll learn if it's any good or not.



ALPHA PROTOCOL

In this day and age, when all it takes for the moral majority to foam at the mouth is hearing that you can machine gun innocent people to death in a videogame, it's good to see some developers taking a less homicidal spin on their shooters. A tweet from Obsidian has claimed it's possible to complete *Alpha Protocol* without killing a single person.

This probably means the devs took a leaf out of the *Batman Crime Fighting Manual*: Never kill bad guys.

Gas, electrocute, paralyse, terrorise, maim, concuss, fracture, stab, and torture until they wish they were dead, but never kill bad guys.



GAME	PUBLISHER	ETA
GRAND THEFT AUTO: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY	ROCKSTAR	16 APRIL
SHIP SIMULATOR EXTREMES	PARADOX	16 APRIL
THE WHISPERED WORLD	DEEP SILVER	23 APRIL
SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION	UBISOFT	30 APRIL
POLE POSITION 2010	KALYPSO	APRIL 2010
SPLIT/SECOND	DISNEY	21 MAY
ACHTUNG PANZER: KHARKOV 1943	PARADOX	28 MAY
ALPHA PROTOCOL	SEGA	28 MAY
BLUR	ACTIVISION	28 MAY
LEGO HARRY POTTER: YEARS 1-4	WARNER BROS	28 MAY
PRINCE OF PERSIA: FORGOTTEN SANDS	UBISOFT	28 MAY
SINGULARITY	ACTIVISION	28 MAY
BATTLEFIELD 1943: PACIFIC	EA	SPRING 2010
TOY STORY 3: THE VIDEOGAME	DISNEY	15 JUNE
DARKSTAR ONE: BROKEN ALLIANCE	KALYPSO	25 JUNE
TWO WORLDS: THE TEMPTATION	ZUXXEZ	25 JUNE
MAFIA II	2K GAMES	24 AUGUST

AHEAD OF THE GAME

Take heed readers – this is how excited we are over the biggest games that are coming out of the next 12 months.



PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: ARMADA OF THE DAMNED DISNEY SUMMER 2010

MONKEY ISLAND 2 SE: LECHUCK'S REVENGE LUCASARTS SUMMER 2010

STARCRRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY ACTIVISION SUMMER 2010

DEAD RISING 2 CAPCOM 3 SEPTEMBER

FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS BETHESDA 29 OCTOBER

APB EA AUTUMN 2010

ARCANIA: GOTHIC 4 JOWOOD AUTUMN 2010

CRYSIS 2 EA AUTUMN 2010

FI 2010 CODEMASTERS AUTUMN 2010

F.3.A.R. WARNER AUTUMN 2010

MEDAL OF HONOR EA AUTUMN 2010

THE SECRET WORLD FUNCOM AUTUMN 2010

BRINK BETHESDA WINTER 2010

CIVILIZATION V 2K GAMES WINTER 2010

MAX PAYNE 3 ROCKSTAR WINTER 2010

NEED FOR SPEED: WORLD EA WINTER 2010

STARCRRAFT II: HEART OF THE SWARM ACTIVISION WINTER 2010

STARCRRAFT II: LEGACY OF THE VOICE ACTIVISION WINTER 2010

TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED 2 NAMCO BANDAI WINTER 2010

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATAclysm ACTIVISION WINTER 2010

THE AGENCY SOE TBA 2010

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM 2 WARNER BROS TBA 2010

CARRIER COMMAND: GAEA MISSION BOHEMIA TBA 2010

COMMANDER: CONQUEST OF THE AMERICAS PARADOX TBA 2010

DC UNIVERSE ONLINE SOE TBA 2010

DEAD ISLAND TECHLAND TBA 2010

DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION EIDOS TBA 2010

HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE THREE VALVE TBA 2010

MAGICKA PARADOX TBA 2010

RAGE EA TBA 2010

MONKEY ISLAND 2 SPECIAL EDITION

To be honest, what else is there to say about this most amazing, excellent and superb adventure game that hasn't been said before? How about, "We hope

that the interface works better than *Secret of Monkey Island: Special Edition's* did"? And we hope that they get the most important thing right –

Guybrush's appearance and, of course, his beard. It doesn't look like they have, judging by the images seen so far, but we can but hope this is rectified as soon as possible.

Other than that, we can't wait to get our hands on this one, reliving the glory of the spitting competition and the conversation about woodchucks all over again.



CRYSIS 2

If you want to know one of the things we're most excited about when it comes to Crytek's bombastic new graphics card-eating game, it might

surprise you to learn that slopes are high up on our list of Cool Things In *Crysis 2*. It might seem silly to outsiders for grown men and women to get

excited by characters standing realistically on a slanted surface, but those people just don't understand the pain we've been through over the years, watching our digital brethren air-walk down stairs or kind-of half-float, half-sink into any vaguely angled surface. We welcome the age of the slope and all that it brings with it.



R.U.S.E. UBISOFT TBA 2010

SPEC OPS: THE LINE 2K GAMES TBA 2010

THIEF 4 EIDOS TBA 2010

TRON: EVOLUTION DISNEY TBA 2010

DEAD SPACE 2 EA EARLY 2011

SWORD OF THE STARS 2 PARADOX EARLY 2011

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC LUCASARTS SPRING 2011

GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER UBISOFT AUTUMN 2011

ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES SEGA TBA 2011

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 2 UBISOFT TBA 2011

DIABLO III ACTIVISION TBA 2011

WARHAMMER 40,000: THE MMO THQ TBA 2012



JON 'LOG' BLYTH...

Foxes, Photoshop, Bishops & Tits



Complex subjects do my head in. That's why I write about games, because, apart from being the world's most profitable entertainment medium, they're games, so are, by definition, trivial.

I mean, I can get a review wrong. I can lose the confidence of readers, my peers, and become blacklisted by publishers, and suffer endless rotary knees to the nuts of my self-esteem, but it all boils down to saying, "Well, I liked/didn't like it, it was/wasn't fun". Basically, what I'm say is, I'm sorry I overscored *Spore*.

So, I find it difficult when something slightly intricate comes up that I should have a strong, bold opinion about. For example, I don't know what to think about Ubisoft's new DRM. I know I don't like it, but isn't that just because I'm predisposed to rolling my eyes at the idea of billionaires like Ubisoft aggressively defending themselves against... us? I'm definitely one of the hypocrites who doesn't like fox hunting, basically because it's posh wankers fanning about on horses. But in the pub, I'll dutifully pretend my objections are about the cruelty to them poor dinky raynards.

THE FOXES OF PIRACY

For starters, I don't feel qualified to talk about piracy. Apart from not knowing the facts – like everyone else – how dare I lecture on the evils of piracy when I'm in the luxurious position of being able to phone up a publisher, and say, "Oh hi, I'm writing a feature about excellent games, can I have all your good ones please," knowing they will?

So I can't judge pirates. In some cases, say, if you're skint, and couldn't afford the games any other way, then I'll think "Well, the publisher's not lost a sale, and if it stops you stabbing my nan to get cash, fill your boots."

But if you're a political pirate, then I'm a bit suspicious. I understand people copying *Photoshop*, because it's priced at a professional level, and most of us only want to put tits on a bishop. If it was a straight choice between buying it and not using it, it'd be simple. We'd just install *The Gimp* and suffer. I've used hooky *Photoshop*. But I'd be the last to suggest I was exercising freedom of digital information, and bravely defying the suffocatingly corporation-serving copyright laws of capitalism. I wanted to put tits on a bishop. For free. Even in a society where 70% of people think broadband is a fundamental human right, it's hard to argue that one.

Besides, unlike *Photoshop*, when you copy a game and play it, it's not like only using the crop tool in a hooky version of *Photoshop*. You're getting the full, intended purpose of the game. Unless you're shit at it, I suppose. Perhaps you should get a discount if you run through shooters without listening to the audio logs, or if you only play Chun Li in *Street Fighter*. I came to my senses and stopped collecting feathers in *Assassin's Creed II* at 92% completion. I'd want my 8% rebate.

There's another breed of pirate – you could be one of those file-hoarding dicks who wants something just because it's there. In this case,



"In my gut-mind is the idea that DRM is posh twats hunting a wily fox"

your punishment is in-built – you're doomed to a hard drive full of games, music and movies you're "getting around to". It's opulent choice paralysis. I used to have 300 Automation disks for my Atari ST, with around three games on each. I basically played my retail copy of *Wizball* while my game collection laughed at me from its cupboard.

Somewhere in my gut-mind is the idea that DRM is posh marketing twats hunting a wily and elusive fox. Only in this case there are millions of Freeloading Mr Foxes, and the huntsmen, instead of killing their target, are taking the novel approach of inconveniencing everything that isn't a fox, in the hope that the foxes will be so keen to play *The Settlers 7* that they'll, erm, stop being dashing, cunning, foxes and instead opt for a lifetime of inconvenience, along with everyone else.

As you can tell, I'm confused. And what I do when I'm confused, is listen to other people, and decide whether they're right based on whether or not I like them. So, what do you think? Can you convince me one way or the other? Can someone basically offer me a Simpleton's 101 on the whys and should nots of piracy? This also means I won't have to think of an idea for next month's column, as I'll be answering these. One idea a month, indeed. It's monstrous, what is expected of me.

EMAIL YOUR THOUGHTS TO ME: log@disappointment.com

If you want to enter into a debate with this professional opinion stater, you can contact Log by the methods below.

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BILL ROPER,
DEVELOPER, WARCRAFT AND HELLGATE

FROM HERO TO VILLAIN

Adam Hartley talks to Bill Roper about his successes and failures

BEFORE THE YEAR 2007, Bill Roper was beloved by PC gamers, due to his work on *WarCraft*, *Diablo* and *StarCraft*. Then in 2003 Roper left Blizzard to co-found Flagship Studios, and began working on *Hellgate: London*. When *Hellgate* was released, the high hopes of many PC gamers were crushed, and Roper went from beloved to reviled.

Until recently Roper was the Executive Producer of Cryptic Studios' MMO *Champions Online*. He took a break from fielding job offers to answer a few questions.

Q How did you get into the games industry?

A Back in 1994 I was working at a photocopying store, doing desktop publishing. I had a good friend who was an artist at Blizzard, and they were looking for somebody to do the music for the PC version of *Blackthorne*. I also did some voiceover work for a demo reel they were taking to that summer's Consumer Electronics Show (CES). I also helped to write the script for the first *WarCraft* – sitting with Blizzard's sound guy in his tiny closet office and coming up with all those original ideas for the universe.

Back then Blizzard was very much a meritocracy, so if you were able to show that you had the ability to do something then you were given the chance to give it a try. Which shows how very different the industry was at that time. I quickly went from this guy that came in to do funny voices and bits of music to the one who created the backstory for the *WarCraft* universe!

How do you direct and manage a large creative team?

Things work very differently for every team that you work with. I find that most theories of management tend to be about understanding what works naturally in a team that has excellent communication and the ability to look towards a common goal. Keep lists of things. Get a box of Bud! As a manager

there is no substitute for wandering around the team and just saying: "How's it going? What are you working on?"

Blizzard grew rapidly through the '90s. How did gaming change then?

Through the '90s the PC started to become less expensive and more popular, infiltrating the home, so we started recognising that there was an opportunity. And the area that we were able to latch onto was that there was a connectivity with PCs that simply

to what today's players expect from their PC games.

Just looking at the amount of traffic around Battle.net when *Diablo* and *StarCraft* first launched was a huge indicator that we were doing things right and that we were tapping into something that was in the process of exploding.

Fast-forwarding to the last few years, you've had your own ups and downs with *Hellgate: London*.

are going to take six years to develop it if they want to, because they have the support and finance, and they could say: "You know what, we are going to need another year on this." That's extremely rare – if not unique – in the industry.

However, when that is how you grow up, then that is how you think. You shoot for the moon. You go for the big home run. You just keep iterating until it is ready to go.

How was the *Hellgate* experience for you personally?

The thing that really disappointed and saddened me was that it went beyond the "Hey, you guys made a game and I thought it was crap" posts to personal attacks on people.

This bizarre thought process somehow suggested that we did things specifically to screw our players. As if we were all sat around plotting what we could do next that would really make them angry. No developer thinks that!

It was really exciting though, don't get me wrong. Certainly that was the first major entrepreneurial step that I'd taken, in terms of being there from day one, creating

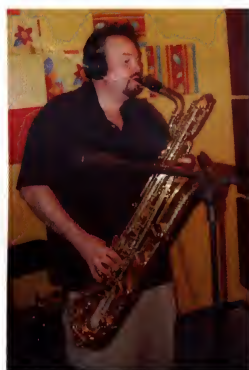
something from the ground up, both from the game standpoint and in terms of the company.

I'd never trade that experience. Even with the fact that we ended up failing so spectacularly.

What have you learned from your 16 years of making PC games?

That very connectivity that helped the PC to explode, becoming a massively popular games machine in the first place, now feeds into our greatest challenge, as there's now such a high bar for developers to hit when creating a PC game.

But that's exactly what still makes PC gaming all so exciting. It's that challenge that keeps me motivated as a developer, and so enthusiastic about going to work every day. What we do is so hugely different now from back in 1994. And that's the exciting part. **PCZ**



"There are certain things that Blizzard does that we tried that failed"

didn't exist on consoles. This was always a major focus for Blizzard: "How do we use this connectivity?"

That whole concept of playing with someone else from anywhere in the world was revolutionary at the time that Battle.net launched. It was very forward-thinking.

Were there any particular 'Oh my God!' moments?

Yeah, I remember when we shipped the original *WarCraft*. At one point they upped the order to 125,000 for the initial shipping total. And that was just insane back then – it was a crazy number. We started to think: "Wow! Maybe this is gonna work."

Then *WarCraft II* just took off in a way that no-one expected. I mean, we did it in about 11 months. And I think if you looked back and played the game now it would seem very short compared

Hellgate: London was very much a roller coaster ride. I was fortunate enough to be able to start up my own company with a talented bunch of individuals. And I think that maybe the thing that was the most difficult for us to overcome was that there was such an amazingly high degree of expectation from our company and from that game.

We raised the expectations for the game to unobtainable heights. By the time *Hellgate* launched the expectation was that it was going to change the face of PC gaming. Fans and reviewers were actually saying that!

So the team's rep from working at Blizzard was a bit of a millstone?

Yes. We had gained a lot from growing up with Blizzard, but there are certain things that Blizzard does that we tried that failed. You know, Blizzard can work on a game and they can decide that they



Bill Roper standing in front of his wall of glory. And Hellgate.

DRM'S BIRTH

Hate today's online authentication system? Guess who did it first...

"So many people would go on about the fact that so many people were playing *Diablo* and *WarCraft* in Asia, but at Blizzard we never saw any money from that, because it was all pirated copies.

"But *StarCraft* was a huge step in combating piracy. It was the first game where you had to input your key to play and be authenticated and identified as owning a legitimate copy by the server.

"This has always been a real challenge, particularly on the PC because of the whole open nature of the platform. But it wasn't so much on consoles, because people just weren't able to pirate carts back in the day."

1



F1 2010

DEVELOPER Codemasters **PUBLISHER** Codemasters **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/f1_2010
ETA September 2010

EVERYONE CRAMMED INTO the nightclub Codies were using to showcase their new Formula 1 game said the same thing: "I haven't played an F1 game for years, but I really liked those Geoff Crammond ones from way back."

If those games are still the nostalgic benchmark for F1 racing simulators, it's a sad state of affairs. Someone needs to take the dusty crown, give it a real good polish and bring F1 gaming into the here and now.

Codies, using the EGO engine that makes other games like *Colin McRae's DiRT* and *Race Driver: GRID* look so delicious, are hoping they can finish in pole position with this one.

F1 2010 certainly looks pretty and from experience we can also say that it's incredibly difficult when played with a wheel and with the in-game driving aids all disabled.

At least, the sum total of *PC ZONE's* efforts failed to make it round a single lap without all the wheels coming off.

2





THE BIGGER PICTURE

1. FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

It's all well and good busting the chops of AI drivers all the time, but real drivers take their skills online, competing against people who clock incredible, mind-boggling times after months of practice. *F1 2010* is going to have a whole raft of online options, although we don't yet know if there's going to be anything out of the ordinary. Expect the usual slew of challenges, time trials and that sort of thing for now, until we hear more.

2. LICENCE FEE

As you'd expect from an official product, this'll have all the bumph, paraphernalia and gubbins from a licensed title. Meticulously detailed and accurate cars, the proper drivers, teams and circuits. That means you can fulfil the wish of Formula 1 fans everywhere and drive Michael Schumacher's car straight into a wall, crushing his bones into paste and leaving him in a pile of twisted metal and wreckage. Or just win races easily, your call.

3. THE LONG HAUL

Codies are promising an "extensive and challenging" career mode, which will allow you to create a new driver (we assume) and rise from the bottom of the ranks, joining and switching teams and eventually becoming the guy who can't lose because his car's miles better than everyone else's. And what could be closer to the true spirit of F1 than that?

4. WEATHER REPORT

Rain plays a big part in the Formula 1 season, so it'll be important to simulate the effects of liquid on tarmac accurately, otherwise Codies will be sure to feel the wrath of many an aggrieved F1 nutcase. The most advanced weather system in any driving game is what's promised and who are we to argue with a press release.

5. POLE POSITION

You don't want to make the pit stop, but in *F1 2010* perhaps it'll be more fun than usual. Codies say they are working to make the whole pit lane experience "tense and exciting" as your shiny motor is polished and worked over by a gang of faceless nobodies in overalls. We'd love a 'realism' mode where a grease-stained mechanic comes over to Schumacher, looks his car up and down, sucks in air through his teeth, and then tells him the parts won't be in for two weeks and that he'll have to wait. That would be amazing.

4



5





A NEW SEASON

Soccer-mad **David Brown** takes a look *Football Manager Live's* reboot

DEVELOPER Sports Interactive PUBLISHER SEGA WEBSITE footballmanagerlive.com PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 205

LET'S TAKE A look at what we said way back in issue 205 about *Football Manager Live*: "Sports Interactive haven't yet managed to kill off the scourge of the obsessive MMOer". Now, more than a year later, *FML* is on the verge of a reboot with those MMOers being one of the major reasons behind the decision.

Sports Interactive's guru of all things *FML*, Marc Duffy, believes the reasons behind the game stalling and the subsequent drop off in player numbers are threefold. Firstly, there were the elite players who became unbeatable because

of the structure of the game. They sucked up all the best players, both young and old, pricing everyone else out of the transfer market, and dominated everything to do with the game.

DOMINANT FC

"When we did analysis last year," admits Duffy, "we found that most of the teams in the top 100 in any game world had been there since day one, and had accumulated the most money, so there wasn't a hope in hell that anyone was ever going to catch them. This meant nobody wanted to join those game worlds, and if we wanted to keep a game world going for 10, 15, 20 seasons, we had no chance of attracting people."

Secondly, there was the error in judgement that lead SI, perhaps excited about player numbers in the initial phases of the game's life, to open far more servers and game worlds than necessary. Every time one got to 70% of

capacity, another new one would be opened. After a while, players began to leave the older worlds, making them effectively ghost towns where the elite would rule over an empire of few subjects. The new worlds would then be decimated by veteran players employing all the fast-track tactics made popular on servers, leading to the process of domination beginning again.

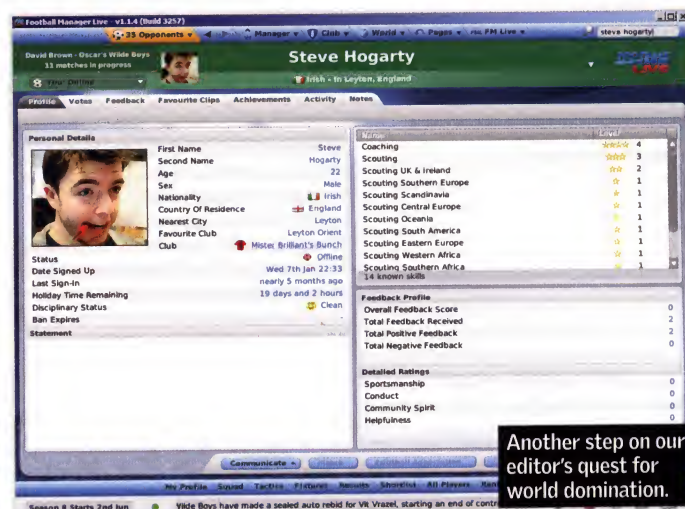
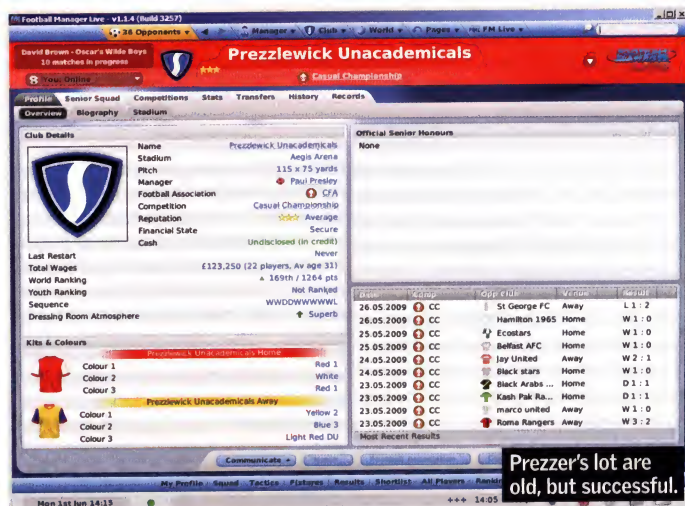
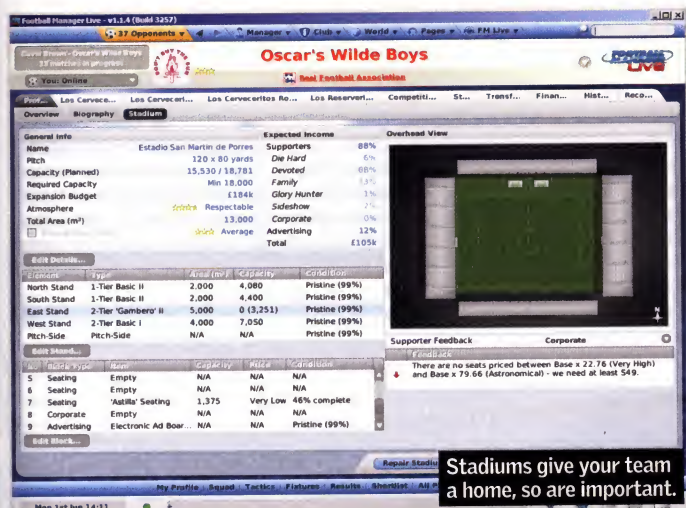
As you can imagine, when there's no prospect of non-elite players advancing

or building even a reasonably successful team, especially when you're paying for the privilege of basically failing constantly, numbers began to slide. The third issue that compounded the other two was that just mentioned: price. The minimum subscription model you could go for was a £24/quarter affair. Players who just wanted to try the game out for a little bit to see if they liked it were left out in the cold somewhat. A year-long subscription for over £70 also proved

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ It's *Football Manager*
- ✓ Much fairer balance
- ✓ Simplified pricing
- ✗ Much improved opponent AI
- ✗ Bloody complicated





perplexing to a lot of potential players, who naturally refused to countenance such an outlay on a game. Consider that the majority of *Football Manager* players play only that game, and maybe a basic selection of blockbuster titles as well, and you can understand the difficulties of pitching a project like *FML* to them without a short-term trial option.

PRICED OUT

"When we went for the hard launch in January 2009, that [£72.99 for one year] was the price every potential player saw and they just went 'I'm not going to pay that much for a game,'" Duffy laments.

"The minimum you could pay for was three months, so anyone who just wanted to come along and try out the game had to pay £24. Originally, we wanted the game to cost two pints a month, but it ended up being two pints in Norway rather than the UK."

But hope is around the bend, with a new beginning for the game. A reboot that, with all football puns that could be

applied to that word ignored, could really lift it off the bench and back onto the online pitch as a viable contender for your readies. For a start, there'll be two ways to play it: Fantasy and Returning Stars. The former is a completely randomised world, where no names are real and only your abilities and list-scouring will be able to sort the Djimi Traores from the Torben Piechniks.

The Returning Stars will be for those not necessarily wanting to compete with the *FML* elite, with real footballers and a very promising draft system that grants bonuses to new and weak players. Essentially, after every season, certain older stars retire and are reborn in the game at the same age they are in reality, with updated stats to reflect their age.

The players with the worst teams, or who've just entered the game, will get the highest draft picks – the worst team will get the best reborn, and the 10th worst team will be given the 10th best reborn player. Conversely, the best teams and players will be miles down the list,

and will get the worst of the reborns, meaning theirs might just be some no-mark.

SI are hoping this and the other changes designed to keep the world vibrant and relatively equalised will encourage people to stay in the game, even if they did terribly in a season.

The addition of youth academies helps this along too. The best teams will not be able to sign all the best players the second they appear in the game, as they'll only be created in clubs' academies, so teams will all have a good chance of unearthing a new Leo Messi. They can then choose to sell them for big money or use them to improve their own team.

This is certainly a step in the right direction, focusing on renewing the challenge every season for all players, experienced, successful or not. New players will feel their big chance will be

FRANKENSTEIN FOOTBALLERS

To ensure *Football Manager Live's* Fantasy worlds have the same balance as the Returning Stars world, SI are using real-world players to create the ones in Fantasy worlds. To do this SI take a real player – like Ronaldo – from its database to make a footballer from the same country with the same level of overall skill. But this Fantasy player might specialise in a different position (say defence rather than forward in Ronaldo's case), and will get new stats. A new Fantasy player's abilities will be adjusted for their nationality (eg. South American footballers get better technical skills), position (a defender's marking will be increased, even if they were based on a striker) and age (old players are smarter, younger players fitter). Finally they're given a random name and they're ready to play.

a season away, while the best will have to deal with surging newcomers looking to strip them of their crowns.

Competition is what is key for a game like *FML*. Before the reboot, the odds were stacked in favour of those who invested the most time into the game. This time, everyone has a chance – at least, much more so than before. The future looks significantly brighter than it used to for *Football Manager Live*. Oh, and there's going to be a new 3D match mode too. **PEZ**

"The best teams will not be able to sign all the best players"

Despite the power-ups, there are no Italian plumbers here.

It's stationary and it's still blurred. How's that for branding?

KARTS FOR ADULTS...

BLUR

"Who says power-ups in racers can't be fun?" asks **Andy Robinson**

DEVELOPER Bizarre Creations PUBLISHER Activision WEBSITE blurgame.com

WHEN IT WAS seen last year, *Blur* was a bit average. But 12 months make all the difference in the wonderful world of game development, and Liverpool-based Bizarre Creations – responsible for the excellent *Project Gotham Racing* series – has put some roar back into its racer's whimpering exhaust.

On paper *Blur* is *Project Gotham Racing* blended with *Mario Kart*. However, Bizarre have now clearly decided to make a racer that lies at the *Mario* end of the spectrum – and it's all the more fun for it.

Firing Shunt – a sort of electric red shell – is now a violent, satisfying barrel roll of death cast on your unlucky

motorcar target, and, like the *Mario Kart* projectile, you can fire it backwards in your chasing opponents' faces, which is ever so satisfying. Likewise dropping a mine, unlike the dull tin cans in last year's build, now casts an angry and massive black hole waiting to explode in the faces of any unlucky BMW that drifts into its path; while getting annihilated by a first place-homing Shock inches from the finish line is now part and parcel of the experience. All of these attacks on your car will leave you shouting and swearing at your

But it'd be naive to expect the creator of five highly praised racing games to simply pump out a mindless mum-and-dad Kart entry: power-ups are clearly well-balanced and abilities (like the aforementioned Shock) limit their payload to a few yards in front of the lead car, meaning skilled players can dodge them.

"On paper *Blur* is *Project Gotham Racing* blended with *Mario Kart*"

monitor, while grinning wildly.

Having the acclaimed racing house finally pick a side of the fence is great to see. Last year's game had a clear identity crisis as Bizzare attempted to please both hardcore fans and less corner-carving savvy gamers, and ended up satisfying no-one at all. This year's *Blur* is slick, focused and smartly edited.

The cars handle well too: ignore the *Mario* influence and you'll believe you're behind the wheel in a proper arcade racer. The selection of motors on offer range from slick speedsters, drift-happy muscle cars, and the obligatory rough-and-tumble jeeps and vans.

The most impressive aspect of *Blur*'s race is the sheer physical oomph of

battling 19 other vehicles – and their magical zapping skills – around Hackney (yes, that's one of the race courses). The traditional first corner pile-up was simply one of the most intense racing experiences we've had: Audis being blasted out of existence, and scenery thrown 10 feet in the air – it's mental.

The boosted driver count means that *Blur* is a racer in which your opponents are never far away. In fact, most of the time they'll be scratching up your body work, trying to send you flying into a lake or a corner shop with the Force Push-like Barge.

One of the most promising aspects of this game, compared to the likes of *Split/Second*, is its excellent off-the-course functions, which, unusually,

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Bizarre comes to PCs
- ✓ Massively intense
- ✓ Balanced power-ups
- ✓ Call of Duty perks
- ✗ *Mario Kart* with BMWs?

THE STORY SO FAR...
BIZARRE CREATIONS



BIZARRE BEGINS
Fur Fighters and *Formula One* are turned out by Bizarre.

1994



STREET KINGS
Metropolis Street Racer cements Bizarre's reputation.

2000



BATMAN RETURNS
Project Gotham Racing turns Bizarre into a favourite of Microsoft.

2002



ACTIBLIZZ
Activision buys Bizarre. *Blur* and a James Bond racer follow.

2007

Time to get those missiles locked on.

Using the Force is cheating, surely.

THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR

Part of getting *Blur* back on track after its delay required making cuts. And it's astonishing how much went back on the shelf. The 2009 build included an entire dialogue system for the AI racers, in which they'd bellow "Have that, bitch!" And other witty banter towards your shaking windscreen. Thankfully, it's gone. There was also the pitch of a giant, fake social network, dubbed 'Blur Book' or 'My Race'. This would have the game's single-player story progress through other AI characters sending you messages and inviting you to driving groups. This, and even the plot itself, have now gone, making this a straight racer. For the best, we reckon.

includes plenty of stuff inspired by *Modern Warfare 2*. Like the current king of the FPS genre, *Blur* includes game changing perks (called 'Mods'), Challenges and experience points for levelling up and unlocking goodies.

MODDING RACER

Mods include the defensive (less damage from collisions), offensive (get a Nitro for performing a superb drift), and all-round useful (a Predator Cloak for your car – great in the *Destruction Derby*-esque Motor Mash mode). One we found particularly handy glued a laser sight to our rear-view mirror – perfect for backwards Shunt blasts.

Like Infinity Ward's shooter, *Blur* now does an excellent job of constantly rewarding the player, with virtual pats on the back every time you take out a rival or pull off a skilful Mine throw onto an opponent's bonnet.

Bizarre Creations is definitely back on track for its mission of make racing games fun again. On the road *Blur* is a great laugh to play and outside races the impressive array of community and customisation features add depth to the package. Last year's game was a nebulous, indistinct meshing together of two conflicting types of racing games. In 2010 however, *Blur* looks like it won't live up to its name. **PCZ**



It's either fireworks, or the car's haunted.

ETA
**AUTUMN
2010**Fantasy RPGs are
legally obliged to
contain goblins.**EYE SHADOW AT THE READY...**

ARCANIA - GOTHIC 4

Steve Hill goes to Germany in search of goblins...

DEVELOPER: Spellbound Entertainment **PLAY JAMES** JoWood Productions **WEBSITE** arcania-game.com

WHAT IS IT about the Germans and their technical questions? When Michelangelo unveiled the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel to the assembled press, did a German art journalist stick up his hand and ask how many tins of paint it took? Seems unlikely, but when Germans are involved there's always some earnest berk who seems obsessed with how many pixels and polygons a particular game has. They don't realise it doesn't matter.

Thankfully, the German press couldn't make it to the unveiling of *Arcania*, which was held at the offices

of Spellbound, its developer, in a bleak industrial estate on the banks of the Rhine, where the obligatory yellow Ferrari sticks out like a sore thumb. Welcome to Kehl, where the best thing is the bridge to Strasbourg, and the second best is the 24-hour McDonalds.

The obvious question is why are Spellbound developing *Arcania*, given that the puntastically-named Piranha Bytes made the first three instalments. If it's somehow passed you by, the *Gothic* series consists of what used to be known as 'real ale' RPGs, where orcs and goblins stroll a mystical fiddle-de-de land, and dungeons full of unspeakable beasts await smiting from a suitably

hirsute hero. All beards and bluster, *Gothic* was littered with monsters, swords, sorcery, leather, barrels, magic and everything else that makes the genre so derided. Yet despite near Hasselhoff levels of popularity in its native Germany, this hardcore RPG series has yet to make an impact elsewhere, and is largely known for being riddled with serious bugs.

NEW DEV, NEW START


Either way, Piranha Bytes are off the case, and Spellbound are in, selected from some 30 budding developers largely on the basis of a demo of forthcoming orc-'em-up, *Ravendale*.



Everyone has had dates like these, right?

Development on *Arcania* began around three years ago and has been somewhat chaotic, with key personnel leaving, a number of name changes, and the game almost being canned at one point. With the release date extended, it would appear to be back on track, and is presented in what is referred to as mid-alpha stage. Given the heritage of the series, this must be like stepping into a dead man's shoes, but the key message is that *Arcania* is still a *Gothic* game that will remain respectful to the series' history.

"We wouldn't want to completely copy Piranha Bytes," says lead designer Andre Beccu.



The least hot demon
woman we've ever seen.

**"*Arcania* is still a *Gothic* game
that will remain respectful to
the series' history"**

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ New developer
- ✓ New hero
- ✓ Epic story
- ✓ Hopefully fewer bugs
- ✗ Beards
- ✗ Goblins
- ✗ German

"Grah! I'm an angry person!"



<Insert Rentokil joke here>



The hero, all grown up.

SUN RISE, SUN SET

Spellbound are very proud of *Arcania's* day/night cycle, to the extent that they supplied us with no less than 12 screenshots of it in various stages. They're too boring to use anywhere but encircling a boxout, but having just flicked through them in sequential order, we can indeed confirm the sun does come up and go down. It also rains a lot, something we were privy to in our seemingly endless demo, in which we were painstakingly shown a puddle forming as the heavens opened. As a special treat we were then shown the ground drying out when the rain stopped. There was also a bit where you stood under shelter and didn't get wet. Exciting, no?

Er, no.

"because they make their kind of game. We make *Spellbound* kind of games. We are different culture-wise, what we like, what we are, what we embody. So we just make our kind of game and we try to stay true to the atmosphere, not to disappoint the fans, but at the same time of course we are trying to capture a new audience, so of course changes have to be made."

Superficially at least, one of the key changes is that of the lead character. The Nameless Hero of the previous three games is no more. *Arcania* continues from the specific ending of *Gothic 3* where that hero became king. Instead of shoehorning in a storyline whereby he loses his throne and becomes a weakling (possibly by the triple blows of a coup d'état, amnesia and plague), Spellbound decided to stamp their mark on the series with an all-new hero, and as such you begin the game 10 years after

Gothic 3's end as a lowly shepherd boy living in the paradise island of Feshyr. This green and pleasant land largely acts as a tutorial before you're thrust into the markedly darker island of Argaan, part of the Southern Islands mentioned in the previous games. There you find swamps, jungle, mountains, desert, cities and dungeons, all delivered in a seamless streaming experience, with no loading time between regions.

Without getting too technical, *Arcania* looks to have a decent engine, delivering vast panoramas and impressive draw distances. Basically, if you can see the outline of a city on the horizon, it exists and you can walk there.

TINY IS BETTER

There shouldn't be too much aimless wandering about though, as in a buck with tradition, Spellbound is claiming that their game will be smaller than its



GOthic
The saga begins. Germany rejoices. World shrugs.

2001



GOthic II
More of the same from Piranha Bytes. Crazy name, crazy guys.

2003



GOthic 3
The series officially becomes a trilogy. Still hugged to buggery.

2006

ARCANIA
Spellbound set out developing and the new name is agreed on.

2010



<Insert another Rentokil joke here>

looted and pillaged, and the aggressors making good their escape by boat, it's down you to man up and get involved. There's also a mysterious love interest, and familiar characters will reappear, including stalwart Diego, who's similarly intent on revenge. Some of the classic weapons from the series will reappear, enabling melee and range combat, along with the trademark fireball and a whiff of magic. Pinpointing the combat as one of the weaknesses of the previous games, sizeable improvements have been made in that area.

"The combat is way more fast-paced," said Beccu. "In previous versions it was more like waiting until there was a gap in the enemy's defence. Right now it's about initiative, choosing strategy, adapting to what kind of enemies there are and changing it on the fly if it doesn't work."

While you can specialise in particular areas, Spellbound are being careful to ensure that you don't paint yourself into a corner, and you should be able to comfortably progress through the game whatever your talents. There's also the obligatory crafting, enabling you to make a fancy weapon or simply knock up a delicious feast. And you may have to appease the Gods of Earth, Wind and Fire (or something), choose sides in an epic battle and make some soul-searching moral decisions.

THIS IS HARDCORE

So far, so RPG. Unbelievers won't care, and *Gothic* aficionados will be wary of the new developer, and particularly the "new audience" they speak of.

A sizeable bulk of those newcomers will be enjoying the game for the first time on an Xbox 360, but we're assured that the game will remain loyal to its PC roots. We are shown both versions, with a key difference coming in the combat. Whereas console owners will be able to lock onto enemies, the mouse and



Well they look harmless enough.

KILL ALL RODENTS

Is it a mole? Is it a rat?



Amidst the myriad RPG clichés, the relentless extermination of the local rat population has long been a mainstay of the genre. Not in *Arcania* however, where the tables have been turned by the inclusion of something called a mole rat, which a quick look on Google has just revealed to be a stomach-churningly horrendous wrinkly hairless actual creature.

Using official documents from the previous games, Spellbound have come up with their own interpretation of what a mole rat would look like in the sunnier climes of the Southern Islands, as hinted at in previous games. So before you mercilessly club it to death in return for a minor XP boost, do be sure to check out its suntan.

keyboard brigade will be offered a more skill-based affair requiring precise timing. Spellbound make a comparison with *Modern Warfare 2*, whereby the console controls in that game snap to the target and those of the PC requiring manual aiming. That's probably the only time *MW2* will be compared to *Arcania*, which looks to be, like its ancestors, a defiantly niche experience, albeit not overwhelmingly so. Despite the simultaneous Xbox release, Spellbound are quick to dismiss any notions of their game being designed to appease a console audience.

"If you want it to be a challenge it definitely is a challenge," says Beccu. "It's got a completely PC only interface. If you want to be as '*Gothic*' as possible, you simply disable all the help, choose the highest difficulty and it will be really hard. The difference with the previous titles is that it will still be pretty fair so it doesn't expect you to know things from the first or second playthrough. You can beat it on the first one without dying 50 times in a row, but it will be extremely hard nonetheless."

In Germany, *Gothic* is almost a byword for hardcore and Spellbound concede that the core values that make the series popular in its homeland are precisely those that make it unpopular elsewhere else. Nevertheless they're



Shades of Robin Hood here.

remaining true to those values, and, in a nod to hardcore fans, will be including help-free quests where you'll simply have to wander around aimlessly, talk to everyone you can, and presumably remember what they said. Furthermore, there will be some well-hidden items that you can only gain access to by solving puzzles, finding levers to open secret rooms, and generally being busy.

Even during our extensive first look at *Arcania*, we would appear to have only scratched the surface. The game's true depth will be revealed later this year, but the franchise would appear to be in safe hands, mainly belonging to a bunch of blokes sat in windowless rooms punching ones and zeroes into a bank of computers.

Hopefully they won't make too many mistakes and turn it into a bug-riddled mess, something we jovially mentioned as an icebreaker. The deadpan Germanic response: "That is not something we are trying to emulate." **PCZ**

"In Germany, *Gothic* is almost a byword for hardcore"

ETA
MAY
2010

Even the Prince wears Ugg boots now.



BACK TO THE FUTURE...

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE FORGOTTEN SANDS

David Brown always preferred the Prince's old pyjamas look

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal PUBLISHER Ubisoft WEBSITE prince-of-persia.uk.ubi.com

IF YOU'RE GETTING to a place in long-running games where you have to call your game an 'interquel', it might be time to think about just moving on to something new, rather than slotting new games in between old ones like some horrific dusty sequel sandwich.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Continues *Sands of Time*
- ✓ Elemental powers
- ✓ Lots of combat
- ✗ No pyjamas
- ✗ Likely to have annoying DRM

'Interquel' is a bastardisation of English Ubisoft PRs invented to describe this new *Prince of Persia* game. Its release is being timed to coincide with the release of the blockbuster *Prince of Persia* movie coming out next month. You've probably heard about it already, as your female friends have likely been spamming their Facebook feeds with pictures of the film's Prince – Jake Gyllenhaal – sporting a washboard stomach and chiselled pecs.

We won't be anywhere near an cinema in May though, if Ubisoft get their way. We might just be pinned to our chairs, fixated by the site of a non-Gyllenhaal Prince vamping it up on our

monitors in classic, non cel-shaded *Prince of Persia* style. Interestingly enough, the game's plot isn't that of the film, instead it goes all the way back to the *Sands of Time* trilogy, which ended in 2005 with *The Two Thrones*. This one, *The Forgotten Sands*, goes further back, as it's set between the events of the first (*Sands of Time*) and the second (*Warrior Within*) games. Hence 'interquel'.

Story-wise, this means the developers can't do anything too dramatic with the universe. After all, how would they then

explain everything getting back to 'normal' in the second and third games? So, instead, the Prince is sticking to his tried-and-tested scenario – the kingdom is under devastating attack, and time-warping sand is needed to save everyone.

As such, he can rewind time straight away. There's no messing about with contrived explanations of why you haven't got access to the time warp powers, you just do, right from the get-go. It'd be boring (aka 'the same') if he just did the same things as before, so

"The Prince is sticking to his tried-and-tested scenario"

THE STORY SO FAR... SOME OTHER PRINCES



RICH AND ED
The two little Princes
who vanished from
the Tower of London.



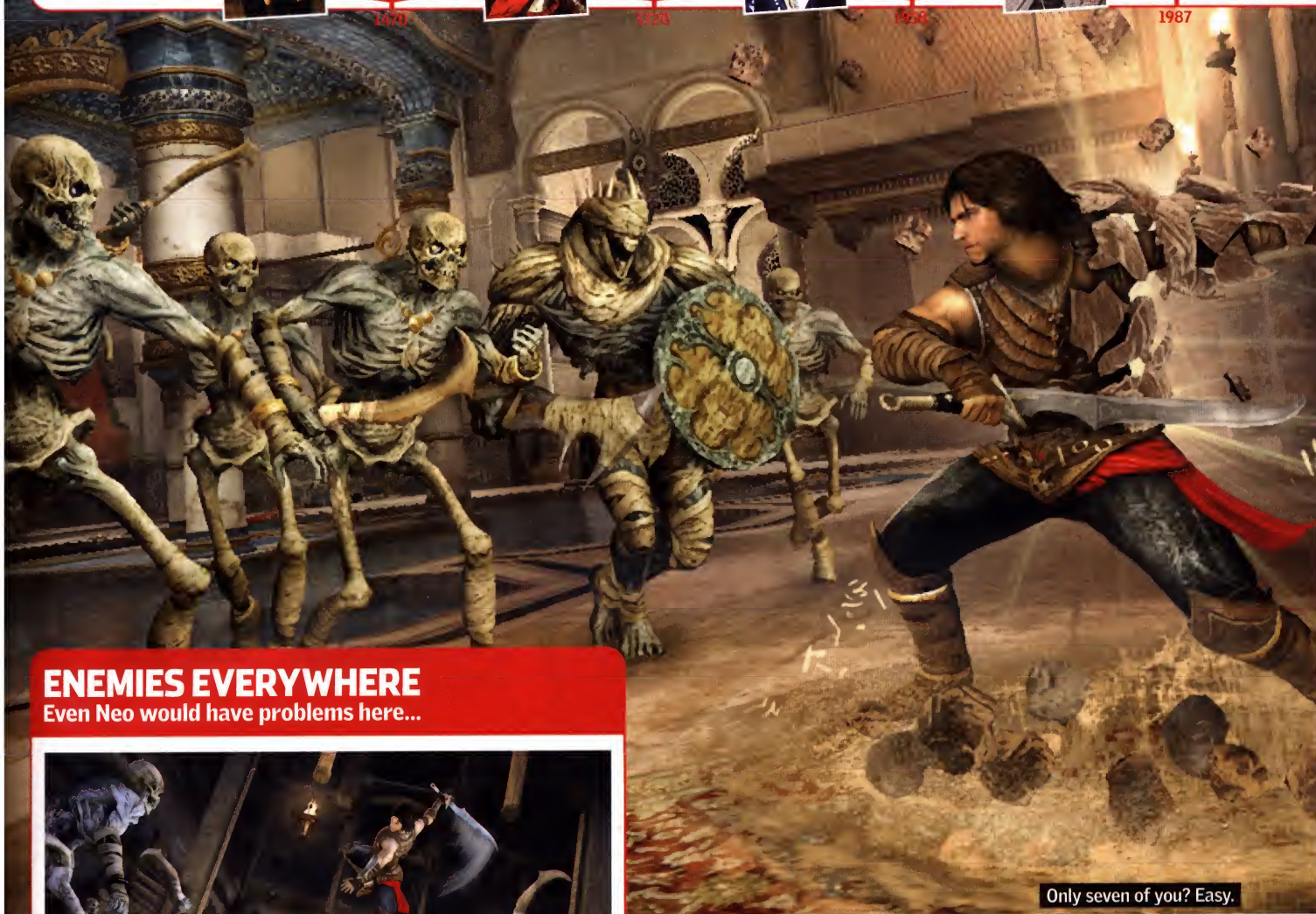
**BONNIE PRINCE
CHARLIE**
The man who had no
chance of being king.



PRINCE
The artist always
known as Prince,
despite the symbol.



**KEVIN PRINCE
BOATENG**
Plays for Portsmouth
FC. Likely for sale now.



ENEMIES EVERYWHERE

Even Neo would have problems here...



As you can see, foes will not be thin on the ground. To succeed you'll have to use the environment to your advantage. Here, you can imagine the possibilities of using an earthquake attack on the ground, sending all the skeletons flying about as they're repulsed by a shockwave. Alternatively, he could unleash his Tornado power, buffeting the boney bastards all over the shop. It's certainly going to be interesting to see what sort of amazing abilities the Prince will have as he takes on groups of 50 or so soldiers.

Ubisoft are giving him a load of new elemental powers to learn throughout the rest of the game. One of these will be a freezing ability, so, for example, you could stop a water fountain in time so you could climb it. This is a water-based power, so we're interested to see what the other elemental ones bring in terms of gameplay-changing mechanics.

As well as these core powers, there are also some more minor abilities, which can be obtained from a Djinn named Razia. This guy will operate as the obligatory salesman/shop guy that every action game released nowadays seems to need, setting his stall up in an alternate

dimension. Not the handiest of places, but it makes it easy to explain how the Prince can access him at any time.

LOADSABADDIES

The other core thing about the new Prince games (aside from parkour) is the combat. There'll be no shortage of it in *The Forgotten Sands*. At times, you'll be fending off up to 50 enemies at once, although the emphasis won't always be on killing them all, but on evasion and crowd control. Summoners conjure up fresh enemies as long as they're left alive, so prioritising enemies on sight is essential here. It's going to be a quick-



Such architectural
extravagance.

paced affair, with no blocking at all, so you're going to have to be nimble if you want to avoid taking damage.

Powers bought from the Djinn can also be used, such as Shield (a wind based power capable of knocking back enemies) which can be fully upgraded to Tornado, a room-filling blast that kills those nearest to you and knocks others to the floor. Toppling enemies is key to success here, as once foes are in the dirt the prince can quickly assassinate them.

Elemental magic suggests interaction with different elemental areas – fire suggests lava, earth forests and so on – though so far only the usual gamut has been on display, your baths, prisons and palaces. What we know is that, potential DRM issues aside, this could be a shot in the arm for the series after the less-well-received previous game.

We're certainly more enthusiastic about it than we are about the film, at any rate. **PCZ**

ETA
**WINTER
2010**The only way to deal with
fat men in skater pants.

DAWNING OF THE...

DEAD RISING 2

Who's that fat grey-skinned guy, groaning and
lurching at men? Oh, it's *Jon 'Log' Blyth*

DEVELOPER Blue Castle Games PUBLISHER Capcom WEBSITE dead-rising.com

THE CONSOLE ZOMBIE
shooter *Dead Rising 2* might be a new phenomenon for PC gamers, but with fresh and startling reassurances from Capcom's PRs that they'd mutilate their own feet if the PC didn't get a concurrent release, it's nice to think that as Ubisoft drift from PC gamers' favour, Capcom might be coming closer.

Especially because *Dead Rising 2* throws so many zombies onto the screen. At one point, I found myself riding a chainsaw-equipped motorbike through a mass of over 2,000 of them.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ On the PC, at last
- ✓ Gloriously absurd
- ✓ Co-op a welcome bonus
- ✓ Great MP mini-game collection
- ✗ Lost core horror



Gnarly.

Both the PlayStation 3 and the Xbox 360 versions handle the game's sheer volume of grey flesh admirably, but this sort of tech showboating is what the PC was made for.

ZOMBIE GAMING

So, here's the story so far: in the first game, photo-journalist Frank West went to Willamette to discover a shopping mall overrun with zombies. His only mission was to find out what was going on. In the process, he ended up escorting dozens of survivors to safety, confronting the psychopaths

who thrive in a world gone dead, and ploughing his way through crowds of milling, lunging, and groaning zombies.

Left 4 Dead this most certainly wasn't – not least because it pre-dated Valve's classic by over two years. These were slow zombies – Romero classics – proof that there's still room for ponderous, inevitable doom in the modern age of sprinty biters. Basically, Simon Pegg would approve.

This time, the star is Chuck Greene. Here's what we know about the story.

He's taken his family to Fortune City to take part in the gameshow, *Terror Is Reality*. It seems that mankind has adjusted to the ever-present zombie menace by using them as cannon fodder in a murderous gameshow. We can only assume there was an escape, because Fortune City has now turned into zombieland.

Multiplayer was absent in the first game, but the sequel has been given *Resident Evil 5* drop-in, drop-out co-op, and the chance to play through the



Mr Muscle didn't like the new spin on his adverts.

THE STORY SO FAR...
DEAD RISING 2



THE FIRST
Capcom make *Dead Rising* – an imperfect 360 gem.

2006



LEFT 4 DEAD
Valve steal undead thunder and momentum.

2008



BLUE CASTLE
Capcom strategise by farming out to Western dev.

2009



CO-OP
The Jap/Canuck effort's looking pretty convincing.

2010

Guitar Hero: Zombies.
Inevitable really.

lest you run, unarmed, into a handbag shop and have to escape the milling throng swinging a D&G purse over your head.

This time there are maintenance rooms, which let you experiment with combining items. Canoe paddles and chainsaws make a sweet combo, as do electric drills and buckets. And if you resent the zombies having all the hat-wearing fun, the Super Slicer has spinning blades on a LEGO head, allowing you to run head-down through a crowd of zombies.

Gladiators-style games of *Terror Is Reality*. This is sheer, stupid fun – in *Pounds of Flesh*, you wear a steel moose helmet and toss zombies onto a weighing scale. Most meat wins, so aim for the fat ones. *Ramsterballs* has you in cages, aiming as much for each other as you are for the zombies. The finale, *Slicecycle*, is the real showcase – four players driving almost blind through an arena being constantly refilled with hundreds of zombies. The money you win the more you can spend on weapons back in the main game.

And dear sweet mercy, those weapons. The first game forced you to remember where everything was,

Posh and Beck's new look.

ZOMBIES AROUND THE WORLD

Global zombie no-nos

On the wall of Blue Castle's office is a chart of what you can and can't do with and to zombies around the world. For example, did you know zombie nipples are a naughty no-no in Korea? Or that Japanese players won't put up with any kind of severing animation?



DISMEMBERMENT

NOT ALLOWED IN JAPAN

No wonder Capcom shipped it out to a Western developer. That's the whole point of zombies...

NPC WALKING AROUND WITH WEAPONS STUCK OUT OF HIM

OK EVERYWHERE

In fact, an individual zombie can get pierced or saddled with up to four items. I saw one with three: a barrel, a mask, and an arrow.



GIVING A SEVERED BODY PART TO AN NPC

NOT IN JAPAN OR AUSTRALIA

Oh, come on, that's the definition of *World of Warcraft*!

CHILD TURNING INTO A ZOMBIE

NOT OK ANYWHERE

Sadly, there'll be no pregnant women giving birth to raging zombies. Movies are allowed that, but we're not.



STAMPING ON A CRAWLING NPC'S HEAD

NOT OK IN JAPAN

Crawling seems to have a strange significance in Japan, as it's only allowed as a sign of injury.

NAKED ZOMBIES

NOT OK ANYWHERE

But zombies have no need for clothing, so surely it makes sense for them all to be naked!



ZOMBIE NIPPLES

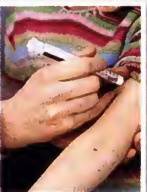
NOT OK IN KOREA

What's up with nips, Korea? You've all had one in your mouth, why not cop a dead one in the eye?

ZOMBIE NIPPLES SEEN THROUGH CLOTHING

OK EVERYWHERE

At least we know what's globally decent now. Thanks, consensus!



ATTACKING PEOPLE WITH SEVERED BODY PARTS

NOT OK IN JAPAN, KOREA, OR AUSTRALIA

So that means Japan and Australia might not be able to use the *Dynomeat* – a delicious severed hand that attracts zombies and blows up when eaten?

INJECTING CHILDREN WITH STUFF

OK EVERYWHERE

This surprisingly permissive attitude comes with one disappointing proviso: it has to be obvious that the thing being injected is medicine. Boo.

And all this, while retaining the first game's 72 Hour Mode – a simple but effective way of encouraging players to become intimately acquainted with the locations, while rewarding persistence by making you constantly stronger. Not many people solve the mystery on the first attempt, and no-one gets the best ending. But when you start over – or simply give up and start again – you'll keep all your extra health, inventory slots, speed, strength, and special moves. And then, you'll earn more.

Dead Rising 2 is everything a sequel should be. It removes the

problems of the first game (that one-save limit certainly added to the dread, but it could be a real pain in the dick) and massively amplifies the wild, childish humour and solemn dread that made the first game so memorable. It's difficult to judge how well Blue Castle might have retained the original's sense of fear and doom, as our hands-on experience was purely with a powered-up Chuck. But the Canadian devs are clearly huge fans of the original, and they're having a great time making the sequel. You can't help but fall in-love with that. **PEZ**

ETA
**AUGUST
2010****HARD MEN, NO HAIR...**

KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS

Better, no doubt, than a ferret fortnight reckons *Mike Channell*DEVELOPER IO Interactive PUBLISHER Square Enix WEBSITE kaneandlynch.com
PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 217

THE PLOT OF the first *Kane & Lynch* was almost as unhinged as its pill-popping psycho star Lynch. Starting off as a Michael Mann-inspired crime caper, it hit players with a crunching third act gear change that switched from gritty urban slay-grounds to plugging an army of

mercenaries in Havana and orienteering through the jungles of Venezuela. The game couldn't have been any more schizophrenic if it had featured a horse juggling mini-game and insisted on referring to Kane as Sheila in every third mission. Come to think of it, that might actually have pushed its score up.

IO reckon that for the sequel, they had to make the choice between these two sides of the game's personality: either plumping for a military shooter focussed on Kane's mercenary background or

going for the seedy underbelly of a modern metropolis. Thankfully they decided to take the action to Shanghai rather than farting out an insipid camo-clad clone of *Modern Warfare*.

One thing that hasn't been clear up until now is whether the game's distinctive, YouTube aping shakey-cam style would cause us to blast vomit all over our monitors the first time we dared to finger the sprint button.

NO BARF HERE

Having now had a chance to play the game for ourselves, we can officially confirm that your lunch should stay safely contained in your digestive tract; unless you're rocking the kind of hangover that can only be cured by injecting bacon directly into your heart.

That doesn't mean *K&L*'s shaky cam isn't disorientating, and occasionally we

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Unique visual style
- ✓ Crisp gunplay
- ✓ No sickbag required
- ✗ Will the novelty wear off?
- ✗ Some graphics rudimentary



He looks more like a vampire than that kid from *Twilight*.



HITMAN
47's first outing
wasn't polished but
showed brilliance.



**FREEDOM
FIGHTERS**
US vs Commies
squad-based shooter.



**HITMAN: BLOOD
MONEY**
When *Hitman* games
became brilliant.



**KANE & LYNCH:
DEAD MEN**
A capable shooter, but
had room to be better.

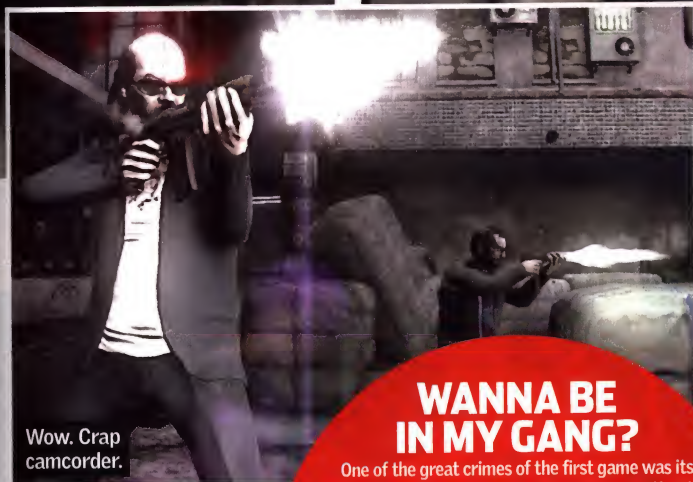
2000

2003

2006

2007

Road rage. Grrr.



Wow. Crap
camcorder.

WANNA BE IN MY GANG?

One of the great crimes of the first game was its co-op mode – Fragile Alliance. Rather than offer the logical option of online co-op, IO instead decided they were going to limit it to split-screen only. Worst of all, because the game was built on the *Games For Windows – LIVE!* platform the only way to play that split-screen mode was to plug in an Xbox 360 controller.

Fortunately this time around common sense has prevailed, and *Dog Days* will have options for both online and split-screen co-op throughout the campaign.

In addition, the Fragile Alliance mode returns and while IO aren't spilling any specifics at the moment, they promise new twists on the formula and several new modes as well.

At the point when that car is hit by another vehicle, there's a moment of utter confusion as the occupants and camera are thrown around.

Once you're in control, the generally subtle effects of compression blocking and overexposure actually distract from the engine's deficiencies, most notably the low-detail character models. In neat touches, every time you get hit, the video

**"Dog Days appears to be shaping
up as a solid shooter"**



"That wasn't us. We found
him like that. Really."



Kane and Lynch,
out for a jog.

had to slow down to avoid clumsily staggering into doorframes as we legged it through the levels. Fortunately as soon as you bring your gun up to take aim, the game knocks off the juddering nonsense and becomes a crisp and pacey cover shooter.

In a way the switch is almost too rapid, as if you make quick direction changes behind cover, Lynch dashes back and forth like an overexcited kitten. This responsiveness is no doubt something we'll be thankful for in the long run, but in our first five minutes of play, we didn't feel like a particularly slick hitman.

As for the rest of the visual treatment, it's pervasive but never obtrusive. Even the cutscenes are riddled with the kind of jump cuts you see on badly edited home movies. During one sequence we were shown, an entire conversation is filmed from a camera resting on the back seat of a car.

feed corrupts and blood splatters on the lens and when an explosion occurs, entire portions of the screen will freeze and distort, gradually returning to normal as the camera recovers from the shock.

LIFE ON A LENS

As for whether *Dog Days* looks good or not is a tough call, because the aesthetic is constantly evolving. Overall we're in favour but while sometimes the combination of effects is perfectly pitched, other times it dips into the realms of the distinctly average.

Set the gimmicks aside, though, and *Dog Days* appears to be shaping up as

a solid shooter. Some of the scripted moments during a sequence where you're picking your way through a car crash on a highway are suitably dramatic, and elements like destructible cover and the ability to improvise by lobbing explosive elements of the environment at your enemies keep things spicy.

Best of all, even if you can't stand the churning camera work during the sprinting, there's a Steadicam option in the menu that will calm things down. It still remains to be seen how we feel once the novelty has worn off and we spend several hours with these initially pleasing mechanics, but the team at IO have taken what could have been an Identikit shooter sequel and attempted something with a radically different style to anything else out there right now. For that alone they should be applauded. **PCZ**

"From there [EA] I became an independent game designer with the Stupid Fun Club. When I told my mother she, of course, reminded me that means 'unemployed'." "Games still have this cultural baggage. Most people think of a game designer as being kind of like a drug pusher, so I guess I'm a drug pusher - an unemployed drug pusher." *Will Wright telling it like it is. Before covering his mouth and muttering, "Charlie? Charlie? Hash? Skunk?"*

"If you play *Civilization* you are an egomaniac. It says on the box, 'Build a civilization to stand the test of time.' If you're going, 'Oh yeah, I can do that' you are an egomaniac." *Sid Meier brightens up an otherwise dull lecture by pointing out the Ozymandias within us all.*



MY GDC ADVENTURE

An exclusive report by *Will Porter, aged 30¼*

THIS IS IT. This is the dream factory. This is where the most creative minds of a generation gather to discuss middleware. This is the Game Developers Conference in rainy San Francisco.

I'm here as a roving reporter for *PC ZONE*; my quest: to journalise the mother-loving hell out of four days of lectures and presentations, all while holding a pint and shouting, "Oh my God, it's John Romero," and pointing at him. My side quest is to gingerly touch the thighs of a host of developers and ask for a job in which I'm paid a lot to point at explosions on monitors and say stuff like, "Make that explosion bigger, within

the obvious memory constraints!" (I will go on to harvest experience in this matter, though sadly a lot of ground will be lost by people being unsettled by being pointed at, and their names shouted. C'est la vie.)

STOP SPEAKING

You'll find the games I saw behind closed doors in posh hotel suites and in the convention's show floor scattered liberally beyond these pages, but the power(s) that be thought that a few examples of my personal shame would add some regional colour.

Primarily GDC allows you to sit in on the thoughts of gaming's greatest

minds in university style lectures, but it also provides an E3-style, tech-minded, show floor where programming tools can be hawked, and eager young students can queue up to meet Blizzard human resources representatives to indulge in some potential employer thigh touching.

GDC is also a place where utterly random inventions that have had been liberally drizzled in wasted venture capital are shown off a few months before their imminent demise. This year's example being a giant revolving hamster ball that allows a player encased in virtual reality gear to play a game with visuals straight from 1996.

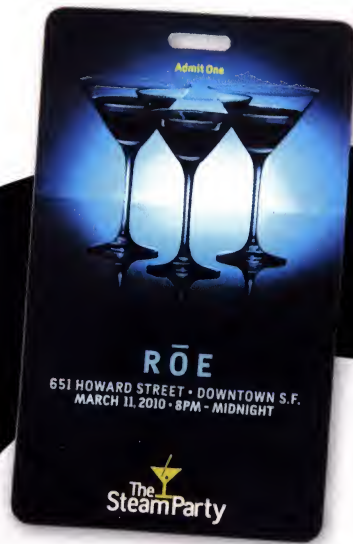
Even greater joy comes when development's great and good hit the various hotel bars and parties at a day's close. Even if you point at your lanyard and shout "Stop! I'm a journalist!", you get told everything.

I'll never let on exactly what (I'm not one for feeding non-PR practiced game coders to the news site wolves) but I could tell you where franchises are headed, what big names are coming back at E3, and exactly what's been going on (and what's going to happen) at one of gaming's more revered and troubled mega-developers.

As a journalist you start to realise that the wall of corporate PR you

"The height of my professional career was when Jack Thompson [the American anti-gaming attorney] called me a child pornographer. I took that as a medal of honour. Actually, that makes me now an unemployed child pornographer." Will Wright, once more, reveals more of the road untravelled.

GIVE IT UP!
NOTHING'S STOPPING ME FROM GOING TO THE
NORDIC PARTY @ GDC
AND THE AMERICAN RELEASE PARTY
OF
JUST CAUSE 2
PARTY STARTS AT 8PM AND GOES TO LATE!
HELD AT RUBY SKYE, 420 MASON STREET
THURSDAY 11TH OF MARCH
BRING THIS INVITE TO THE DOOR!
IT WILL SERVE AS YOUR TICKET!



"When we started on *Monkey Island* I thought me and Dave Grossman were writing temporary dialogue because we were really new. I was sure they'd have professionals come and write the dialogue, so we were goofing around. It took the pressure off us as we were just making each other laugh. Then Ron Gilbert said 'No. This is the dialogue for the game.' I was like: 'Oh. God.' And we never wrote anything funny after that." Tim Schafer reveals comedy genius lies in pissing around.

"They say that the last 20 per cent of your effort gets you 80 per cent of your game. With us it seems to be the other way around: 80 per cent of our effort goes into the final 20 per cent of polish."

Blizzard senior engineer Dominic Fillion explains exactly why we weren't playing *StarCraft II* about a million years ago - they're 'polishing' it.

normally bang your head against is thinner than you might have thought, but also that it's probably necessary to shepherd drunk and blabbing developers past newshounds far crueller than I.

DRUNK TIMES

Of course I was a broken drunk during many of these conversations: a citrus-lipped tequila monster.

My finest hour came during an earnest one-way discussion with fairly notable UK developer, during which I was trying to talk about the numbers of famous faces you could spot amongst the throngs of GDC attendees.

I tried to explain the irrational fear I get when standing near the famous: that I'll do something completely out of character and have to face the consequences. The most recent one had been when standing in a lift next to Will Wright, I started to panic about the repercussions if I suddenly went mental and hit him in the face. I didn't manage to explain this successfully. There was a moment of silence at this juncture.

"I accidentally gave a leaflet advertising 'SF's Naughtiest Hotties' to a leading developer"

"Why do you want to hit Will Wright? Do you not like his games?" was the slow and worried response.

"No! I don't want to hit him at all! I just sometimes worry that I might!"

At this point the man I was babbling at turned 180° and walked to the other side of the room. For my part, I stood in shame until someone took pity and nestled a fresh drink between my thumb and forefinger.

This was a social failing that would remain unmatched until the next morning. It was then that, as a bleary-eyed wreck, I accidentally gave a leaflet advertising "SF's Naughtiest Hotties!" to a leading MMO developer, instead of my business card.

The said paper had been pressed into my hand by a passing leafleteer the previous evening, before spending the night in my pocket and counting down to the inevitable moment of my social and professional doom. The nice man laughed it off, while I cried a little inside.

So anyway, GDC is awesome, apart from when you make a total tit of yourself. Hooray for games! **PCZ**



DOING IT FOR THE FAMILY...

MAFIA II

Alec Meer dusts off his trilby to meet the family

DEVELOPER 2K Czech PUBLISHER 2K Games WEBSITE 2kgames.com/mafia2 PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 218

AFTER 10 MINUTES of being subjected to horrific images, I abandoned my Google-based research into whether the phrase "dick cheese" is authentic '50s slang. Better to give 2K Czech the benefit of the doubt than to spend more time looking at unwashed genitals. After all this is gangster fantasy, not gangster reality.

Broadly speaking, *Mafia II* is *Grand Theft Auto IV* with sharper suits, more mooks, rock 'n' roll, repeated use of the

term "Family" and, hopefully, much more thoughtful and moving storytelling. It's the saga of Vito Scaletta – a World War II veteran popping home to recover from a dicky leg, who ends up embroiled in 20-plus years of Mafioso skulduggery.

With his wisecracking, unpredictable top chum Joe by his side throughout, he runs the familiar gauntlet of wealth, power, corruption, violence and tragedy that characterises touchstone gangster flicks such as *Goodfellas* and *The Godfather*, but nonetheless tells very much its own tale.

Where *Mafia II* significantly differs from *GTA4* is that, despite giving you New York in the '40s to the '60s to get up to no good in, it's a whole lot more interested in taking you from A to B to C to D and so on, with lavish cutscenes and

supremely crafted dialogue and animation, rather than letting you do your own thing. The richly detailed vintage New York is there to provide a scenic, fleshed out backdrop to Vito's adventures and misadventures. You don't need to go and get squiffy on Tennessee whisky and muck around with the jukebox in a local bar, or to pick up a fetching new trilby from a high-class milliner, but doing so is in keeping with what Vito would've done.

Likewise, an insane vehicular rampage over the broken bodies of 300 feckless civilians might suit the party vibe of *GTA4*, but it would be out of character for a '50s mobster. Sure, he

kills anyone who disrespects him or his family, or who just gets in the way of a tidy profit, but one thing he wouldn't do is recklessly carry on in front of the feds. Please, feel free to butcher half a dozen people in plain sight in the name of chuckles, but don't expect an easy ride. *Mafia II*'s police are there to be avoided or bribed off the scene, not murdered in droves.

Not that there's any shortage of killing here. The section I played through involved the brutal deaths of a several dozen young men who looked like John Travolta in *Grease*. These cheeky greasers had torched Vito and Joe's cargo of stolen fags, so payback had to be taken. Accompanied by a selection of their Capo's best men, our anti-heroes grab a suitably vintage ride and head over to the metalworks where these kids hang out. While many of them are armed, they hadn't realised they were tangling with the big boys.

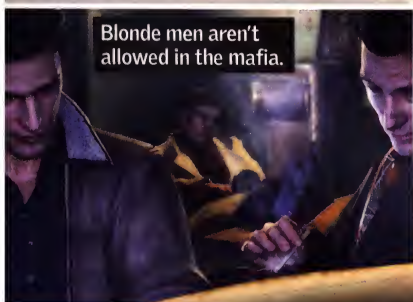
What follows is a bona fide massacre – the greasers' weight of numbers means it's



You tell those crates who's boss, Vito.

ETA
SUMMER
2010

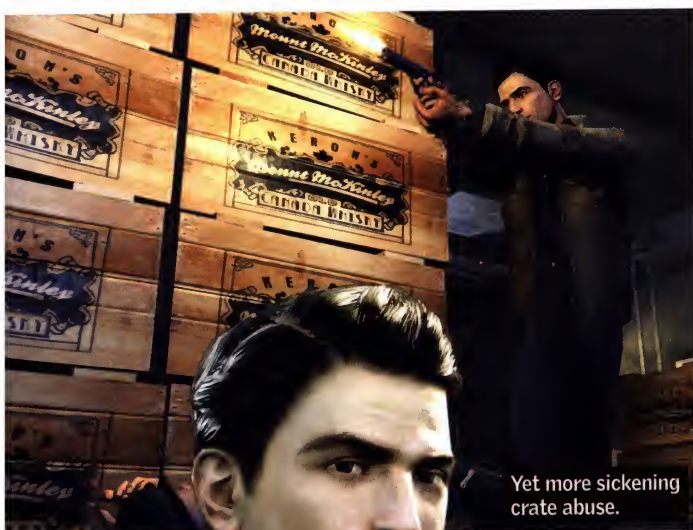
Blonde men aren't allowed in the mafia.



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Free-roamable vintage New York-esque city
- ✓ Period music, clothes and cars
- ✓ Cinematic storytelling
- ✓ Oodles of building interiors
- ✗ Far from pioneering

"Runs the familiar gauntlet that characterises touchstone gangster flicks"



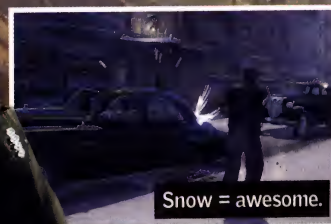
Yet more sickening crate abuse.



Captive, or just really excited? You decide.



Fat Noel Edmonds.



Snow = awesome.

TALKING VS SHOOTING

Actions, words and the loudness thereof

The big question with *Mafia II* is the game-to-cutscene ratio, given its 700-page script. In fact, it's a very combat heavy game, but in a way that's a little hard to call just yet.

The cover system and regenerating health should make it pretty easy, but, in the stretch we played, the high damage suffered by taking a single bullet, coupled with some outright stingy checkpoint placement meant large stretches of repetition upon death. A 2K Czech bod promised that damage and checkpoints were still being honed, so it's possible the game will be more forgiving come release. They're at pains to point out they want this to be an exciting experience rather than a robot-like walkthrough, however, so be assured it'll be a challenge.

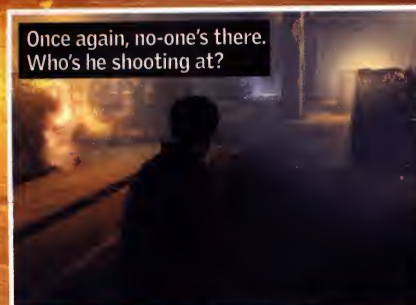
In terms of guns, period weaponry means you'll be running around with rustic stuff like Tommy guns and pump-action shotguns, not rocket launchers and rail guns. That said, the slow drift across 20 years of history means you'll see the march of progress affect your killing tools.



Ah, the classic banana skin slip.



Once again, no-one's there. Who's he shooting at?



A FAMILY AFFAIR

The mooks, meatheads and meanies of *Mafia II*

STEVE

This is Steve, a bruiser for hire, currently in the employ of your Capo Eddie Scarpa. He's not a nice man, possibly because he's suffering from male pattern baldness. He's the one who orders the massacre of the young greasers, shortly after you're done trashing the diner they hang out at, as shown by the flying woodwork here.

MYSTERY MAN

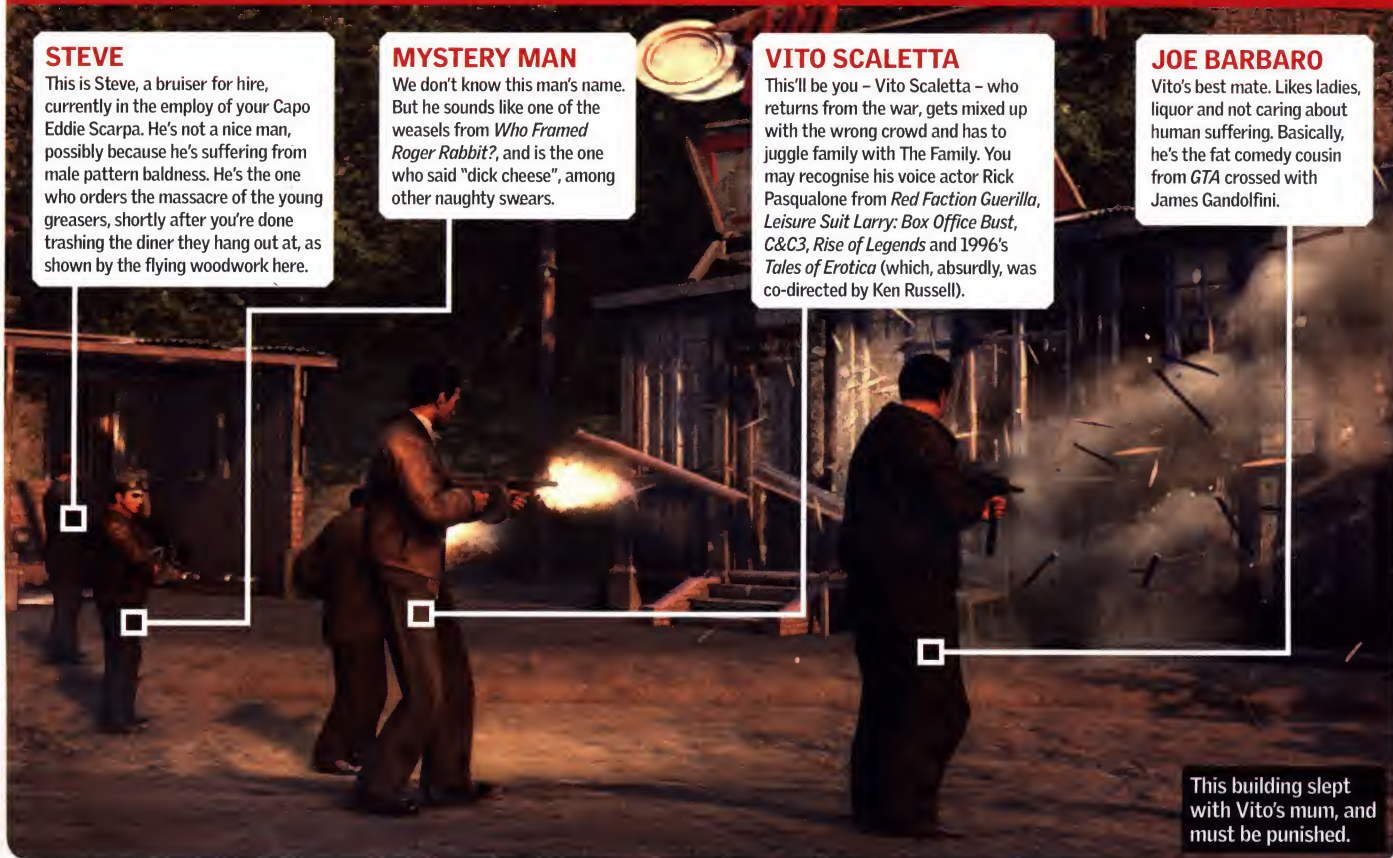
We don't know this man's name. But he sounds like one of the weasels from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, and is the one who said "dick cheese", among other naughty swears.

VITO SCALETTA

This'll be you - Vito Scaletta - who returns from the war, gets mixed up with the wrong crowd and has to juggle family with The Family. You may recognise his voice actor Rick Pasqualone from *Red Faction Guerilla*, *Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust*, *C&C3*, *Rise of Legends* and 1996's *Tales of Erotica* (which, absurdly, was co-directed by Ken Russell).

JOE BARBARO

Vito's best mate. Likes ladies, liquor and not caring about human suffering. Basically, he's the fat comedy cousin from *GTA* crossed with James Gandolfini.



This building slept with Vito's mum, and must be punished.

➤ a satisfyingly taxing challenge for the player, but the screaming and begging of most of your fresh-faced targets means it's not something you'll feel good about. You're only following orders that there can't be any witnesses, so shoot 'em all in the back as they flee. Yes, *Mafia II* glamorises criminal life to some extent, but it also makes a big show of how nasty a business it is.

Not that Vito and Joe seem to clock this entirely. They're more excited about the custom-modified hot rods they stumble across at the mission's end. They're young, naive, selfish and their moral compasses are all over the place, but the game's careful to never leave you thinking they're pure evil. You're going to like them, and sympathise with them - and feel bad when things start to turn

sour for them. Crime doesn't pay, remember? The major events of their bloody dance through the '40s, '50s and '60s are under wraps, but, this being in many ways an interactive gangster movie about the rivalry between three families, twists and tragedy will be big parts of it.

NO FRESHNESS

While it might seem imprudent to dwell on the storyline rather than the game's mechanics, there's good reason for that. You're not going to find much in the way of novel gaming concepts in *Mafia II*. Its main interest is in atmospheric, highly-polished graphics, animation and writing, not in shaking things up. This means that playing the thing is an unavoidably familiar experience, not only if you've played any 3D *GTA* game in the past, but also third-person shooters.



Dogging was less acceptable in 1949.

A *Gears of War*-esque cover system and *Halo*-like health regeneration mean *Mafia II* significantly more fleshed-out and tactical as a combat game, but there's nothing in the controls likely to confuse even a part-time gamer. Our jury's still out as to whether this is good or not-so-good. Innovation is always welcome from the mainstream, but there's much to be said for not having your gaming experience complicated and distracted by needlessly novel show-offing. Especially when the story is so hung around forward momentum; nothing would undermine a bittersweet gangster epic as much as repeatedly falling off a ledge because you can't remember what the 'shuffle to the left



Invisible interrogation scene.



Guys, it's just a shirt. It won't hurt anyone.



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS
Legendarily buggy but also incredibly good.

1996



MAFIA
GTA with bags more style and far more satisfying shooting.

2002



VIETCONG
Competent but uninteresting Vietnam-themed FPS.

2003



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2
Opposite of *Mafia II*: all ideas, and no polish.

2004



"He's hiding! Can't you see he's hiding?"



"Look at the face, not the hat."

whilst grabbing the wall with your tongue' button is.

Oddly, it's easy to forget this is a sequel. *Mafia II* is a self-contained tale and a self-contained world, but it is indeed the offspring of 2002's well-received *Mafia: The City of Lost Heaven*. The broad structure of free-roaming gangstering remains, albeit with the aforementioned refined combat, but *Mafia II* is a subtly different affair. It's more accessible, for one thing – you won't get hounded down by police for breaking the speed limit or running red lights. While such attention to legal detail could be incredibly annoying in *Mafia*, it's hard not to miss such a distinctive touch.

Going some way to making up for this is the more interactive

nature of the city. You can stride (or storm) into over 100 different buildings and cheerily mess about with windows, fans, radios and light switches, or unleash your inner nutter and enjoy the fantastic destructible scenery and its associated physics. For the most part the game is all seamlessly streamed, so you can run right into a shop or bar from the street and start laying mindless waste to the place instantly. The superb visuals aren't just superficial, in other words. Developers 2K Czech (formerly Illusion Softworks) have also hinted that the various indoor leisure pursuits, such as heavy boozing and clothes shopping, will all crop up in the story at some point, rather than being pointless visual frippery.

That said, it's OK to admire this for entirely shallow reasons – the rendering of characters' faces is

extraordinary, while this mid-century New York realises its snowy winters and lush summers beautifully. This being a period city, urban creep hasn't eradicated mother nature, so you'll see plenty of greenery en route to making unrefusable offers. While it's scarcely cartoon-like, the vibrant environments, and especially the impractically large but splendidly shiny '50s autos, mean this isn't another one of those relentlessly grey-brown games which currently saturate the market with desaturated tripe. This world pops with life and colour.

Mafia II is a game that demands adjectives when being described: classy, lavish, glossy, epic, lush, detailed, believable – stuff like that. As such, it's very much *Mafia's* sequel, but this time around it's likely to pick up a much larger audience. The amount of time, money and resources clearly poured into it rather suggests that's 2K's expectation too.

While there's something considerably old-fashioned about *Mafia II*, both as a free-roaming game and in its movie-aping approach to storytelling, that's in keeping with its theme. Style, tradition and unwavering values: this is the *Mafia* way. "Dick cheese," not so much. **PCZ**



"It's easy to forget this is a sequel. *Mafia II* is a self-contained tale and a self-contained world"

"Do you think anyone noticed we're in the exact same pose?"

WHAT A LOVELY APERTURE...

PORTAL 2

David Brown knows some things about *Portal 2* and he likes to share...

DEVELOPER Valve PUBLISHER Valve WEBSITE valvesoftware.com

FOR A GAME that was apparently shoved into *The Orange Box* because nobody knew how people would react to it, *Portal* did rather well for itself. Of course, *Portal* was much more than a piece of filler, and its sequel is looking to move things along substantially while still retaining the concepts and ideas that we all know and love.

Valve don't usually let us down with their sequels (or their games in general, to be honest) and *Portal 2* doesn't look like its going to be an exception. Whether the reaction will be as positive this time around remains to be seen. After all, the novelty value has gone, so *Portal 2* needs to stand up on its own, and for greater periods of time than the first one did. We're pretty sure there won't be anything to worry about. Here are a load of (well, eight) exciting things we know about the game so far.

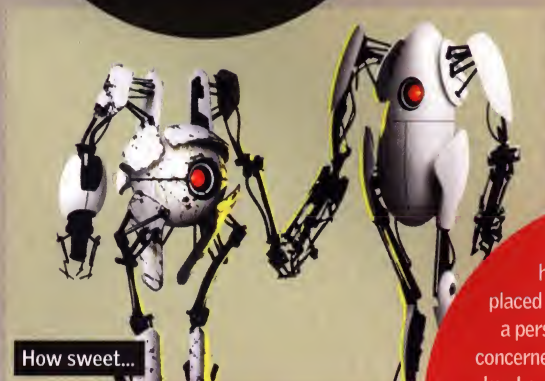
2

What's changed is that you're hundreds of years in the future and the Aperture Science labs have fallen into terrible disrepair, as no humans are around to maintain and look after the facility. If you've been paying attention to the tweaks Valve have made to the original game, you'll know that the ending changed, with Chell now being dragged off by a robotic entity.



3

Our erstwhile heroine, Chell, was cruelly placed in stasis for centuries and now a personality orb named Wheatley, concerned by the state of the facility, has woken her up in order to fix things. One thing leads to another and GLaDOS finds out you're around, starting you off on your new puzzle quest. The personality orbs, if you remember, fell off GLaDOS as you defeated her in the first game and could be seen clustering around the cake right at the end of said saga.



4

Your portal gun works exactly how it used to, but the way the environment and physics is presented should change how you think about things. For a start, there are a host of new concepts to deal with when mentally constructing your escape plan from a room, such as vents that suck or blow air and can be combined with portals. Whack a portal underneath a vacuum and whatever's on the other side will be sucked in.



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ New *Portal*, duh
- ✓ Co-op!
- ✓ More bang for your buck
- ✓ Interesting new concepts
- ✗ Must meet huge expectations



NARBACULAR DROP
Kim Swift set up the prototype for *Portal*.

2005



PORTAL
This was a massive surprise hit for Kim Swift and Valve.

2007



PORTAL: STILL ALIVE
A rehash for the pad monkeys in Xbox land.

2008

PORTAL 2
The second game will have multiplayer and be brilliant to boot.

2010

5

It's not just blowing and sucking, as there's also a new fluid-based system involving paint. Different paints give different physical results when moved on or utilised. Orange paint gives you a speed boost that could prove useful to leap or traverse precipices, while blue paint is bouncy, like a trampoline. Combine these with the portal gun, you immediately start thinking about the puzzle possibilities, like shooting a portal into the middle of a load of paint in order to cascade the liquid onto a different

How things used to be.



AIs are obviously bad at weeding.

6

Another new addition is the Reflection Cube, a basic object that can be used to divert the path of lasers and such, for obvious puzzle-solving purposes. One thing we don't know is whether you'll grow as attached to your Reflection Cube as you did to the less shiny Companion Cube. Will there be a twisted love triangle between the player and the two inanimate boxes? No, probably not.



Did you miss this fella?

7

Let us not forget about that most important of additions: co-op multiplayer. From what we know, it's sounding very intriguing indeed and genuine thought seems to have been put into making it more than just a tacked-on gimmick. It would have been so easy to just go "lulz, let's just put people in a deathmatch environment chucking toilets at each other" but Valve don't often go for the easy option. (Complaints about *Left 4 Dead 2* to the regular address, please.)

ETA
AUTUMN 2010

8

In co-op you'll be playing as two robots, each with different abilities. On the PC, any session will take place using a 'picture in picture' design, so that you can see what your fellow player is up to at all times. Communication is going to be the key as these puzzles will be significantly more complex than the ones in the single-player campaign. To succeed, you and your ally will need to be working together closely, as otherwise it will be impossible to succeed.

The most useful thing ever.



Uh-oh!



Mysterious...

INCOMING TRANSMISSION

How the world found out about *Portal 2*

1. Strange radios begin to appear in existing copies of *Portal*. Manipulation of these devices brings a variety of results.
2. Morse code messages deciphered, images analysed and the world is no closer to working out what's going on. BBS phone number discovered. The game is afoot.
3. The plot thickens. Access of BBS provides number of ACSII images relating to *Portal* and Aperture Science. New lead has been found: the original *Portal* ending has changed!
4. New ending seems to indicate Chell apprehended by mysterious robot. New digital files and resources appear, all point to new *Portal* game. What could they mean?
5. Oh yeah, *Portal 2*'s been announced, planned for a release during towards the end of 2010.



Oh for looser jeans.

ETA
WINTER
2010



HAH! HOO HAH!...

TRUE CRIME

Number-one super guy *Will Porter* is exposed to some potential Hong Kong Phooey...

DEVELOPER United Front Games PUBLISHER Activision WEBSITE truecrime.com

NEVER MAKE A gangster cross. Someone called Dog Eyes has tried to shoot a big gangster's mother, and he's not entirely wrapped up in the situation. "Dog Eyes tried to shoot my fucking mum!" exclaims Winston. "What the fuck? Get the fucking guns!" It really is a to-do.

There's nothing for it, but to drive at high-speed to a heroin processing plant and proceed to kill its workforce –

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Intriguing Hong Kong setting
- ✓ Impressive hand-to-hand combat
- ✓ Awesome Hong Kong action movie influences
- ✗ Another *GTA* wanna-be
- ✗ Needless swears. Tsk

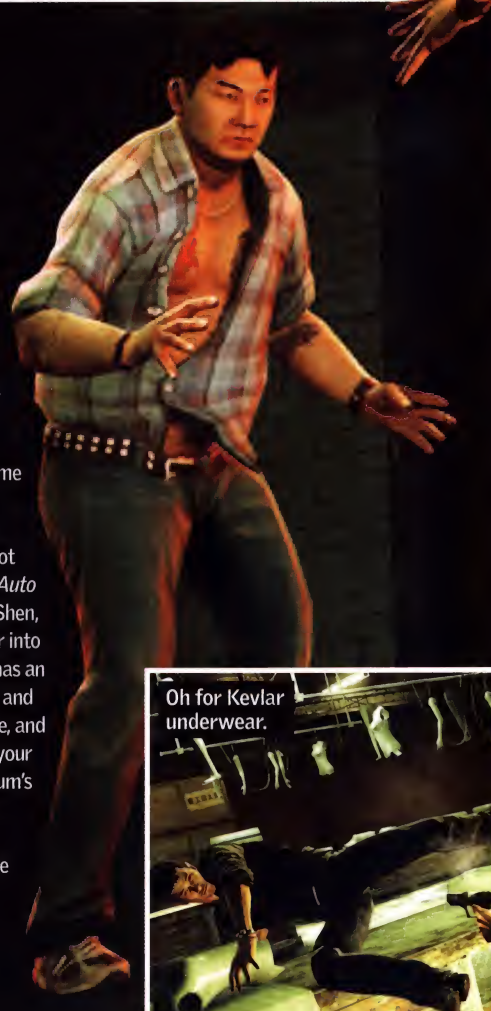
mostly by hand, but others with guns and meat cleavers. Ah, free-roaming crim-sim... how we've missed you in the time you've hardly been away.

"There's obviously one that does incredibly well in the genre," explains *True Crime* producer Stephen Van der Mescht while ignoring the *GTA*-shaped elephant in the room. "So what our whole development philosophy has been based around is finding ideas where we think we can innovate, and create a space for ourselves that way.

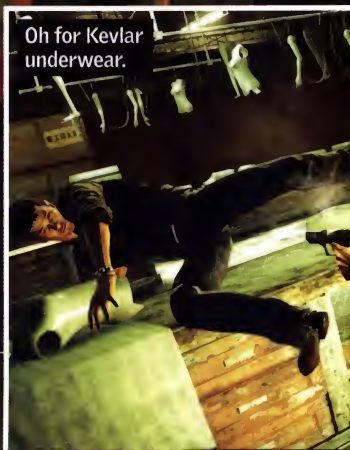
CHOP-SOCKISM

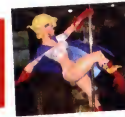
"For us that really started from a gameplay mechanic standpoint: the free-running system, deep martial arts, the melee system and melee weapons, a shooting system with lock, free-aim and cover..."

He's not wrong either, there's little doubt that this reboot of the *True Crime* series (only the name survives from the old buggy free-roamers) has significantly better on-foot action than *Grand Theft Auto IV*. Undercover cop Wei Shen, drawn deeper and deeper into a web of Triad dealings, has an array of impressive leaps and bounds. Vault over a table, and you'll be able to connect your foot with a nearby hoodlum's jaw – while the range of kung fu tussles and punches that are available go above and beyond conventional police training.



Oh for Kevlar underwear.





2007

2008

2009

2010

Eat elbow sucker.



WHEN BAD IS GOOD

There's no particular morality in *True Crime*, but secret snitch Wei Shen will be discouraged from shooting the boys in blue as his 'Face' respect-bar will decrease. He'll also be able to do a little secretive police-work while deep undercover though, with 10 different multi-part cases for him to follow up being threaded through the game's four main gameplay areas.

Each will start off small-scale – perhaps with planting a bug in a girl's apartment or staking out the pad of politician – but will culminate in working through a major crim's henchmen and finally busting the case wide open with the main man himself.

Osteopathy is popular with hoodlums.



As, indeed, are the abilities to use contextually relevant parts of the scenery to kill people: men's heads are slammed repeatedly in fridge doors and their bodies fried on exposed wiring. It's violent, adolescent and carried out to the tune of the most heinous of swearing-words – but undoubtedly slicker than *GTA4*'s terrible combat.

The location is an interesting prospect too. Hong Kong has been chosen because of the impact of recent Triad actioners emanating from the vibrant waterside city – movies like *Infernal Affairs* and *Triad Election*. Indeed, it's Martin Scorsese's remake of *Infernal Affairs* – *The Departed* – that's been the greatest influence on *True Crime*'s plot that sees the undercover Wei Shen move up the ranks of organised crime while in constant contact with his police handlers and forever under threat of being found out. It's fair to say that Leonardo Di Caprio didn't have to kill so many people in so

Organised Crime and Triad bureau who gave us a lot of insight into how they operate."

NEW HONG KONG

On top of this thousands of reference photos have been taken of the various different Hong Kong locations being used and rejigged (this isn't a slavish recreation, as in former *True Crimes*) from the fishing villages and waterfront of Aberdeen to the towering financial heartland of Central Hong Kong recently seen in *The Dark Knight*.

On paper, this all sounds rather fun. How can a game in which you can leap from a motorbike to the top of a moving truck, before grimly gripping to it while the swerving lorry attempts to throw you off, not be an engaging prospect? Well either I just got a lot older and bought a copy of the *Daily Mail*, or *True Crime* is trying that little bit too hard to impress the teen market with its (un) unique blend of casual violence, ladies of the night and total barrage of fuck-words and rudeness.

"Hong Kong has been chosen because of recent Triad actioners"

many exciting ways, but the drive for authenticity in *True Crime* is a real one.

"Our writer has been across numerous times to meet with a host of interesting characters to gain more insight into the world that we're developing – not least of all some ex-Triad people," explains Van der Mescht. "That's been really interesting, getting some perspective on how they work and what that's all about. From the law enforcement side we've also actually met with the ex-head of the

Talk to the developers and the game does sound like an intelligent thriller with an original setting, watch their demonstration and it's a Western-looking Chinese chap running around a burning heroin plant waving a meat cleaver. The hope then is that the final product will be settled around the place that these two visions overlap. After all, Dog Eyes totally shot at Winston's mum! Who wouldn't have an eff and a jeff about that, before massacring hundreds of crims? **PCZ**

Sometimes when another man has a much bigger gun, you just can't fire.



BEFORE, AND DURING, THE DARK TIMES

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

Will Porter infiltrates LucasArts' secret facility

DEVELOPER BioWare PUBLISHER LucasArts/EA WEBSITE swtor.com PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 216

STRANGE TO SAY it, but when you first start playing *The Old Republic* you forget it's going to be built like an MMO. Missions, such as the one I played at LucasArts HQ over the course of this year's GDC, are doled out in such dramatic and wordy ways that you're temporarily blinded to the fact that the bomb-pursuit you're on is

essentially a *World of Warcraft* quest in space boots.

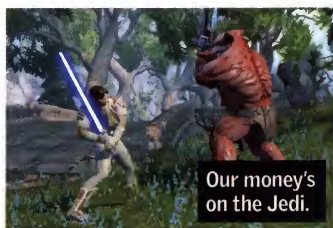
Secure a ZR-57 bomb that's deep within a Separatist fortress on the planet of Ord Mantell, having taken down a force field at another point somewhere within said fortress? Well, that's a little bit of a "fight your way into a zombie castle and bring back some fairy dust"

retrieval quest isn't it? As a side-mission there's also the option to obey the will of a snarky journalist called Lamalla Rann who has a colleague that's gone walkabout on a nearby island, who wants him and his scattered recordings found for a handful of credits. This too is straight from the school of "Brother Tooms was out collecting magical herbs on the Island of Death, where there happen to be werewolves, I hope he's not dead" quest design.

This isn't meant as criticism, as we're certain the *The Old Republic* will sit comfortably within the realms of the badass, but with the expectations that come with the *Knights of the Old Republic* badge there are just things that

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ MMO *Star Wars*!
- ✓ More words than the bible!
- ✓ Probably has Wookiees in
- ✗ Occasional NPCs have bad hair
- ✗ Still to be seen how it works



Our money's on the Jedi.

ETA
SPRING
2011

THE STORY SO FAR... THE OLD REPUBLIC



UNVEILED, THIS IS
The Old Republic shown
off to all and sundry.
Sundry is gobsmacked.



CARRY ON DOCS
An outright amazing
cinematic featuring is
shown at E3.



CODE TEST
Press given chance to
play a Sith attacking
an Imperial vessel.

SUPER TROOPER
We devour a Republic
Trooper playtest, but
still lack MMO details.

2008

2009

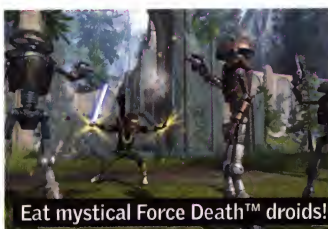
2009

2010



Every NPC is voiced.

Someone's had
their Weetabix.



Eat mystical Force Death™ droids!

need underlining. You can have all the voiced NPCs in the world, they can be as pleasant, funny or sarcastic as a writer can make them, but the next group of humans you come across are still going to be a bunch of ultra-dim cannon fodder mobs who stand next to a log until you cross the boundaries of their magic circle of aggro.

PHANTOM MMO

If anything, the wordiness and high falutin' tendencies of *The Old Republic* make this difference between quest-giver and XP-harvest mob ever more stark – even if human mobs do have basic AI routines that make them hunt out cover.

Again though, this isn't necessarily a problem – just another thing that needs to be highlighted in an attempt to manage the vast amounts of expectation revving up behind a game that's being set up as the

Fashions don't
change through
the millennia.



JAKE NERI PRODUCER, LUCASARTS LUCASARTS ANSWERS

Jake Neri, one of the producers on *The Old Republic*, faces down a PCZ interrogation droid.

When the floodgates open on *The Old Republic*, is there a worry that people will go direct to playing Jedi classes rather than the Republic Trooper that you're showing today?

I originally thought perhaps. But as time has gone on every class we reveal has generated support from a group of people. It seems to speak to them. With each class, whether it's a Jedi, Bounty Hunter or Trooper, we've tried to deliver on what people love about them from the movies.

If it's a Bounty Hunter for example, people want a jetpack and they want flamethrowers – cool gadgets. So we try to make sure that that's there. We've got a compelling storyline, yes, but you need to feel like Boba Fett in the movies. So if we do that – I think that people will be drawn to those classes and not just the Jedi.

One of the things about our game is that each class has its own storyline, and I think that people are to play a lot of these: they're going to dabble around. They might try a Jedi,

then they might try a Trooper... as they're trying them they might find a playstyle that they like.

Just how customisable will characters be?

Right out of the gate there are a lot of different visual customisations, and there'll be the option to be different species too. Then over the course of your gameplay you'll have lots of options – items that you'll pick up, lots of styles of clothing, multiple talent trees to go down and differentiate your combat style, the different companion characters.

Customisation, to us, isn't just a visual thing – it's really about your playstyle. How do you want to play? Do you want to solo? Do you want to play in large groups? What's your role in those groups? These are all things we fit into the customisation bucket.

Will there be mounts for everyone to run around planets on?

There are certain things that are standard to MMOs that make a lot of sense, things like mounts. No details on that right now. We may have mounts, I'm not sure.

But if you went to Hoth you'd have a tauntaun?

Yeah, you may...

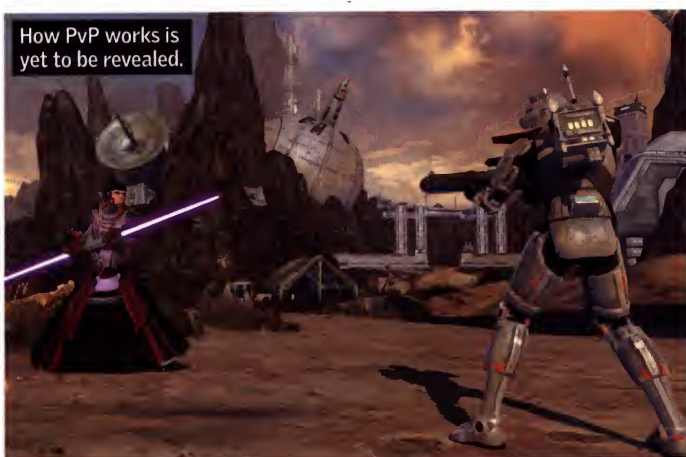
How about a rideable Rancor?

That would be pretty sweet. A gigantic Rancor pet that could just rip everybody to shreds. That would be pretty awesome.



A woman with a lightsabre?
I blame the prequels.

How PvP works is yet to be revealed.

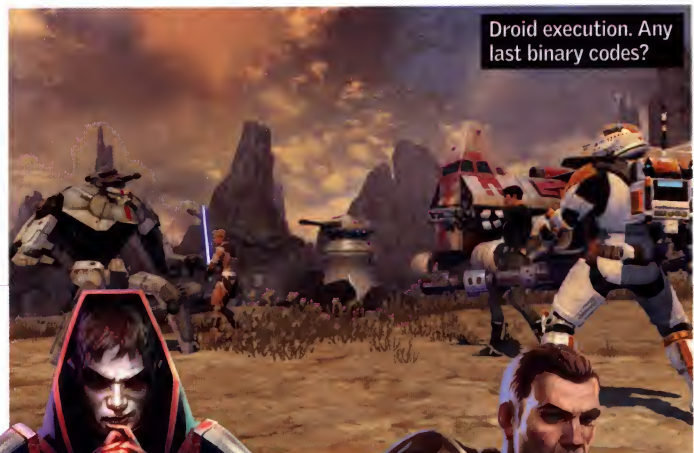


So much for elegant weapons and a more civilized age.

Sith powers were first discovered due to plastic carpet fibres.



Droid execution. Any last binary codes?



"The game is still in its early days, so things will change"

second coming.

Yes, it's well on its way to being an excellent game – but in the hubbub it's easy to forget that it'll still be an MMO with most of the usual contrivances of the massively multiplayer role-playing genre. You need to also be aware that the game is still in its early days, so things will change and develop over time.

In fact, one of the few things that stands no chance of being tweaked before release, and therefore something we can most certainly complain about right now, is the fact that some of the NPCs have cheesy American grins and awful hair. Personally, I like my *Star Wars* characters looking as scruffy as a nerf herder.

In any case, as a fledgling Republic Trooper – and an inductee of Havoc Squad, "the finest military special

operations group in the galaxy™ no less – I had to carve my way through a cavalcade of the respawning separatist bastards.

TROOPER JANE

Unlike Force-powered characters who operate from a pool of mana/force, my lady Trooper worked on an action point basis – the more basic blaster rifle attacks I used, the more points gained that could be spent on her more powerful special abilities.

These included slamming a rifle butt in the face of my foes, leaving them out for the count on the ground for a while, a more concentrated stream of rifle power and two sorts of grenades – a light one



Bad guys always get the best robes.

INTERGALACTIC PLANETS VARY

The low-down on some of the alien civilisations that will reverberate to the distant hum of sabre



ORD MANTELL

Starting planet for both the Smuggler and Republic Trooper classes, Ord Mantell is in the grip of a civil war. (So far, so very *Star Wars*). Here the Republic are on the tail of separatists who aren't averse to exploding civilians, and to make matters worse the local planetary government is a front for the various smuggling, bounty hunting and space pirating organisations that call Ord Mantell home. In short: it's another one of those hives of scum and villainy that George likes so much.



TYTHON

The place where the tenets of the Force were first tapped into, thousands of years before science proved that it was all due to midichlorians rather than a hokey old religion. Nevertheless this is also where the first schism in the Jedi occurred, and while the Force-users abandoned the planet an evil taint was left behind (yes, that trope again). Now, rebuilding their temple on holy ground after the Imperial attack on Coruscant, it's a problem that this roaming band of super-powered life-monks will have to face up to.

KORRIBAN

Korriban is a desolate, red and dusty planet: conveniently, the right setting for a noxious, evil civilisation such as that of the Sith. Originally home to the true Sith race, before it was beaten in various wars, it's become something of a graveyard for evil-doers for a long while now. When the Sith Empire returned to confront the Republic Korriban was one of the first planets it took back. The Sith Academy is now well established, and many students have already received their BTECs in Force Chokery.



TATOOINE

Thought the sand planet was all about moisture farming and sand people? Wrong. There's actually an ancient Czerka secret weapons complex deep beneath the dunes, and the Imperials and Republicans are squaring off in two parallel dusty towns just above it. This smells like a PvP session to us, but it's also an interesting twist on what must be the most lore-packed desert in entertainment history. It also has two-suns doncha know? And its more disreputable citizens are based on some appalling Jewish stereotypes.



CORUSCANT

A place of shiny mega-buildings and the home of the goodie-goodie two-shoes Republic, is also a planet that's been severely damaged by Imperial attacks. Not only has the Jedi Temple been ransacked (check out the awesome cinematic of it happening on YouTube if you don't believe it), but huge lumps of the planet's mega-city need to have a visit from the town-planners. First though, they'll need a visit from goodly MMO players to wipe out the criminal gangs that have sprung up in the ruins.



ALDERAAN

In a few thousand years, these guys are gone. Though it isn't all crown jewels and pots brimming with Earl Grey for these days either. With a nation scarred and battle-hardened by earlier Imperial attacks, more recently the assassination of the prince regent has left the planet in the grip of yet another *Star Wars*-special civil war. The Republic-backed House of Organa are facing off against upstart toffs, backed by the Empire, and history will no doubt get a victor before everyone gets blown up anyway.

with an approach to more convivial damage, and an ace heavy one that attaches to the midriff and panics those it attaches to.

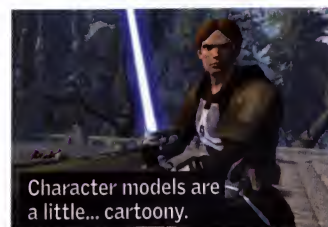
This is a fun and engaging set-up, and one that more than shows off the fast-paced and up-front combat *The Old Republic* is aiming for – having you set against groups of bad guys, and unlikely

to be taken down in one-on-one situations. The way that combat is regular enough to conserve action points between separate bouts to use on your next group of foes gives a great feeling of flow and momentum to your passage through the instance.

What you realise as you play, however, is the sheer amount of info

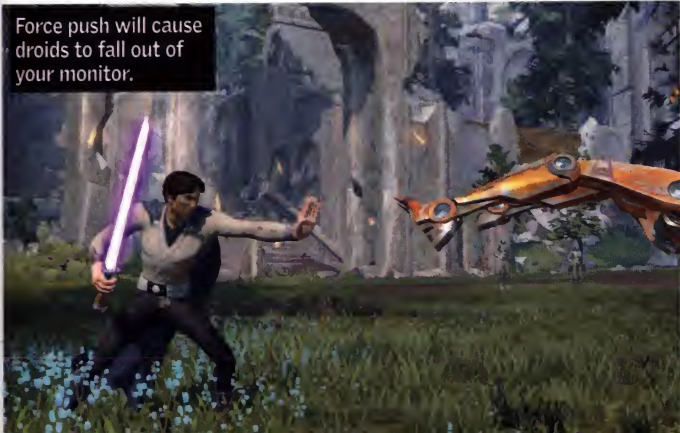
that hasn't been unveiled about the game – essentially all the constituent parts that will make it an MMO. Grouping, PvP, the ways in which your BioWare-tagged companions will be seen by other players, mounts, hubs, economies, crafting, travel between systems... even the area described above had to be played through in an abundantly solo fashion. Perhaps behind the scenes BioWare are still playing around with different options, or

perhaps talk of the more social aspects of the game don't fit within the set-in-stone LucasArts PR plan. More likely it's a mixture of the two.



Character models are a little... cartoony.

In any case, *The Old Republic* remains the greatest gaming hope around – how can a title with more content than every BioWare game put together not cause unquenchable salivation among our happy crowd of PC gamers? Before long though, we really do need to start seeing how the game will operate with some of the said happy crowd running amok inside it and armed with lightsabers. **PCZ**



Force push will cause droids to fall out of your monitor.

ETA
TBA



THE SECRET'S OUT...

THE SECRET WORLD

Will Porter discovers that everything he suspected is true. And involves monsters

DEVELOPER Funcom PUBLISHER Funcom WEBSITE darkdaysarecoming.com PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 214

RIGHT, SCIENCE TIME. Imagine the characters of *Left 4 Dead* within an MMO: normal, heavily-armed people in extraordinary circumstances, surrounded by NPCs with intelligently scripted and well-acted voices and whose pretty ladies don't have up-front areas that come with a jiggle function.

Your next step is to remove the sprint abilities of the zombies and tie them into the Norse myth of undead mariners that was covered in Sylvester McCoy-era

Doctor Who adventure *The Curse of Fenric*. Next: mix in two tablespoonfuls of (360-exclusive) *Alan Wake*, alongside a pinch of John Carpenter's *The Fog*. What you've just laboriously produced in your mind's eye is Kingsmouth: one of the early locations in *The Secret World* – a game that's fast becoming one of the more fascinating prospects around in modern MMOs.

REAL UNLIFE

The deal is that you play a real person, not some mana-slugging member of the faerie-folk, who's been inducted into one of the world's secret societies (Illuminati, Knights Templars or Dragon). Then from a base in New York, London or Seoul (and with growing specialisations in skills like gunplay, martial arts and magical voodoo leanings) you'll set out to uncover the truth behind the various myths inflicting

damage on pretty much every continent available. Invariably, said myths will involve monsters of some description.

The American coastal town of Kingsmouth (which, incidentally, has its own website: kingsmouth.com) is beset by the living dead. And although the residents refuse to use the z-word, it's a phrase that Funcom aren't afraid of when showing off their frankly remarkable menagerie of beasts. Every night, accompanied by a spooky fog

Beware: evil scrap.



Part-time monster hunter. Full-time line dancer.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ MMO set in the real world
- ✓ Bloody huge monsters
- ✓ Brilliantly scripted NPCs
- ✓ Graphics do slimy/icky well
- ✗ Still early days

THE STORY SO FAR...
FUNCOM



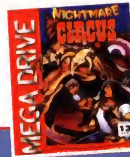
FUN BEGINS
Funcom begins, and makes slightly rubbish Mega Drive games.

1993



PRETTY LADY
Disney's *Pocahontas* video game shocks and awes.

1996



INSANE CLOWN
Nightmare Circus arrives – initially only released in Brazil.

1996

SECRET WORLD
Funcom's MMO and narrative heritages combine for greatness.

2010

"One of the more fascinating prospects around in modern MMOs"



"Eat electro-fizz you evil clawed punk!" (That's what I'd say anyway.)



Not all of *The Secret World* wants you dead.

emanating from something Nordic and evil lurking out to sea, the townspeople come under attack. Said locals are quest givers, and each of them is written and acted impeccably – from the passionate government agent constrained by her by-the-book superior (think Scully if she'd ever listened to Mulder) all the way through to old ladies, worried petrol pump attendants and a grizzled and weary hunter obsessed with putting bullets in zombie heads.

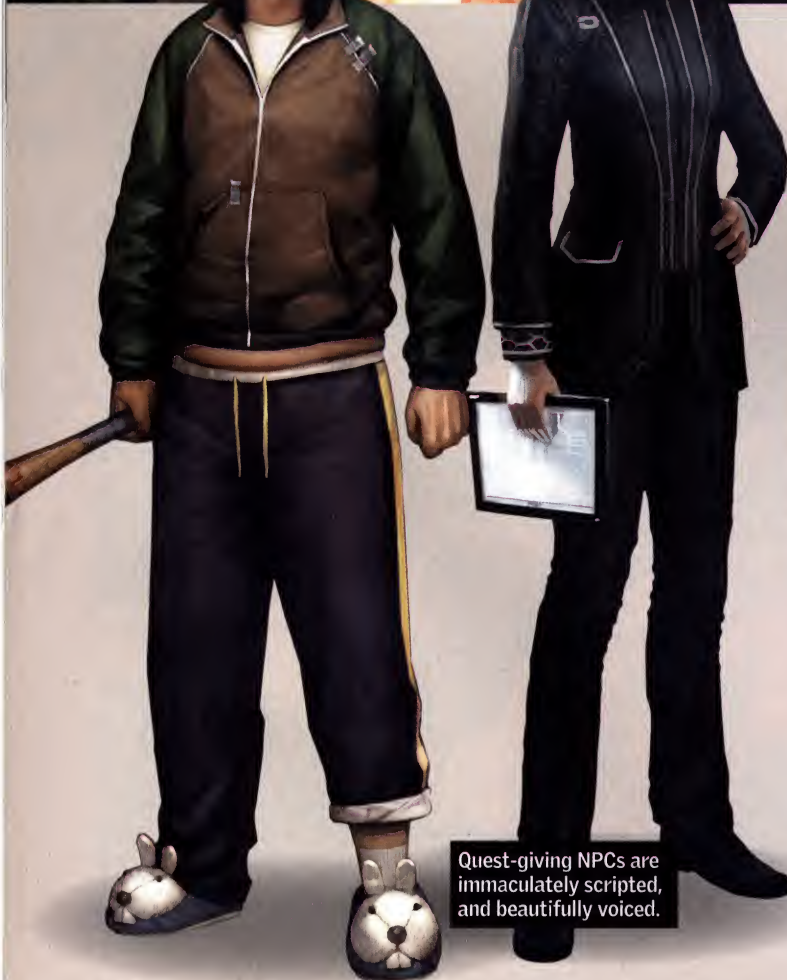
In fact, with the evidence at hand it's fair to say *The Secret*



Insane junk golem must die.



"Alright! Alright! It's clobbering time! We get the point!"



Quest-giving NPCs are immaculately scripted, and beautifully voiced.



There's a strong *L4D* post-disaster tang to *Kingsmouth*.

World's characters will dole out their quests (presumably, "Go and kill 10 topless ladies with tentacles coming out of their stomachs") with a drama and gravitas that goes over and above those we've encountered so far in *Star Wars: The Old Republic*.

The subtle touch of Ragnar Tørnquist, writer of *The Longest Journey*, can be felt throughout the impeccable voice-acting, although whether sustained exposure will get tiring, or indeed whether players will want to sit around listening to drama unfolding when they

could be out harvesting zombie tentacles is a matter that's yet to be resolved.

L4D: THE MMO

As for combat, the Funcom plan is to make it more reactive than your usual pattern of cooldowns and damage dealers. You'll take 14 skills into the fray, seven active and seven passive, but you'll also be aiming and strafing around the place in a far more organic way than you'll be used to.

Sure, Funcom have promised great shakes with combat that came to little in



This chap has an ink-squirt attack. It's awesome.



There's little as sinister as a lighthouse. And a gloomy one doubly so.



Pringle jumpers: No.

THE SECRET BESTIARY

Sadly not including a Secret Squirrel in a Secret Garden

The creatures in *The Secret World* are beautifully designed, and most of them bat-shit insane.

The general look is Harryhausen meets the twisted imagination of Guillermo del Toro, coupled in with a graphics engine that's remarkably good at recreating slimy and shiny surfaces, as opposed to the more primary coloured beasts that you're more accustomed at slaying in MMOs.

What's more, just because you're early in the game doesn't mean that you won't come across some goliath opponents – whether it's a crab that's apparently mated with *Half-Life*'s Gargantua, or a gilled monster that's halfway between an elephant and an octopus and spews out black ink when you attack it.

Basically, someone at Funcom has been eating cheese before bedtime.



Age of Conan, but watching four people take on Kingsmouth's ghoulies, combining their various talents as a group, suggests a fighting style that avoids the rinse-and-repeat number-tapping that's prevalent in MMOs.

There are no classes or levels here either, you're free to build your character whichever way you want from the off whether you want to wave a flaming katana in the face of evil or pop heads from a distance with an automatic rifle.

How big a departure this will truly be from MMO conventions so long-standing they have pretty much been hewn into solid rock is, again, yet to be seen – but Funcom's desire to open up massively multiplayer to those who would usually fear its intricacies and elf-centric nature is obvious.

There's much to be unveiled and explained in *The Secret World*: the way PvP will work as cabals (*Secret*-speak for guilds) take each other on beneath the Earth's surface in a fight for a resource called Anima, for example, as

well as promised in-game shops and nightclubs back in your urban origin area that pretty much make a /dance command a certainty.

Beyond that? Well the hope is that new and exciting troublespots, hubs and instances from around the world will be added over time. Rumour has it we're talking Atlantis, secret Arctic vaults, the Masons being behind it all... pretty much everything you've ever suspected, but The Man refuses to comment on. As conspiracies go, we hope this one goes all the way up to the top. **PC7**

"There's much to be unveiled and explained in *The Secret World*"

ETA
SUMMER
2010

Surely cops are meant to chase you?

NSFW make-out point.

WHOLE NEW WORLD...

NEED FOR SPEED: WORLD

EA throws their keys into the mix and looks at *Will Porter* coquettishly

DEVELOPER EA PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE needforspeed.com/web/world

HENCEFORTH TO BE known as *NSFW* for the entirety of its existence, *Need For Speed: World* is another attempt by the EA juggernaut to attempt to make money out of the pirate-riddled PC market. It's a free-to-play racing MMO, a bolted together spaghetti junction of former iterations of *Need for Speed*, designed to suck coins from the sweaty hands of its players through microtransactions and paid-for content packs.

As you enter its world, which will initially comprise of the towns of Rockport and Silverton extracted from *NFS: Carbon* and *Most Wanted*, you're presented with the ghost cars of other

players running amok. Someone with too many exclamation marks in his name will hurtle by with a police car in hot pursuit, while another car might choose to excitedly drive in circles around you, either eager to make a new friend or to insult you through the chat window below.

"Those who want power-ups on tap can purchase Boost, another currency"

To access the different races just requires a brief click on the map. This will line you up with fellow competitors in an instanced race away from the hubbub, where ethereal forms are replaced by solid livery. It's here that the true MMO trappings of *NSFW* become more evident, with four chosen power-ups lurking in your numerical keys much as troll-bashes and buffs do in *World of Warcraft*. Nos, for example, will give a familiar burst of speed, while more amusing abilities such as Emergency Evade and Traffic Magnet respectively

throw cars surrounding you into the air, and instructs passing NPC cars on a morning commute to bundle in on the car in front.

Access to the skill-trees that ladle these delights into your menu bars is granted through levelling, since during each race you'll earn XP (although *NFS*

cool kids call it 'Rep') as well as in-game cash to spend on refilling your power-ups. And those who want power-ups on tap can purchase Boost, another in-game currency, with their own real-world cash and make sure that their stocks never dwindle.

This is a fascinating project, and one scaled to run on the lowliest of laptops, but whether the somewhat utilitarian and chunky graphics of *NSFW* will truly hook the masses is yet to be seen. As indeed, is whether or not it is safe for work. **PC!**

THE STORY SO FAR... NEED FOR SPEED

THE NEED...
First came to the 3DO, then the PC a year later, as a racing sim.



1995



II
The sequel dumped the original's realism for your arcade fun.

1997

HOT PURSUIT
The second sequel added coppers in fast cars to the mix.



1998



ROAD CHALLENGE
This time you got better AIs and more game modes.

1999

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ It's *Need For Speed*
- ✓ It's free
- ✓ It's an MMO
- ✗ It's a free MMO
- ✗ Silly acronym

A STATE OF INDIE-PENDENCE

The greatest prospects showcased in GDC's side-show, the Independent Games Festival...



VESSEL

DEVELOPER Strange Loop Games **WEBSITE** strangeloopgames.com

THIS IS A platform game in which you can run around with a hose, festooning levels with liquids that behave with realistic physics. The plot sees an inventor, Arkwright, who's created water-based life forms known as Fluros, which have got out of control and need a cull. It's down to you and your squirt-gun to solve puzzles that revolve around drenching, filling things up, or scything Fluros into droplets. Things start off easy, but once you're blasting hot lava liquid and firing gobbets of green goo the difficulty ratchets up. A game to get moist over.



SHANK

DEVELOPER Klei Entertainment **WEBSITE** shankgame.com

AN ASTOUNDINGLY BEAUTIFUL side-scrolling brawler, *Shank* takes two handfuls of the Golden Age of comics and mixes it in with some Tarantino stylings to create the best environment in which to chainsaw a villain through the ribs yet seen. Each of *Shank*'s violent moves merge beautifully into the next in both control and animation. Whether it's during combat with a lumbering boss in an abattoir or fighting as a silhouette on a rope bridge in front of a setting sun it's clear exactly why *Shank*'s been swept up by the bigwigs at EA.



CLOSURE

DEVELOPER Closure Team **WEBSITE** closuregame.com

THE DEAL WITH *Closure* is that anything in the dark doesn't exist. You may know that there's a platform, but if it's not bathed in a light source then your hero will fall through it into the inky depths if he steps forward. As such, *Closure* is a puzzle game in which you must transport glowing orbs around shadowy levels, and direct beams of light from torches you come across so that your path is lit. A truly illuminating game.



ENVIROBEAR 2010

DEVELOPER Justin Smith **WEBSITE** enviro-bear.com

WHO IS DRIVING? Bear is driving! How can this be? We have no idea. Essentially, as the titular bear, you must use your mouse to stab at the pedals, gear stick and steering wheel of a car as you trundle around a National Park attempting to harvest enough food to let you hibernate. Imagine Yogi Bear indulging in a bit of TWOCing. Your car will, however, soon be full of angry badgers. It's just that sort of game. Hooray for indies!

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PCZONE— Last one to subscribe is a grubby pair of cheap iPod earphones

F3

WILL PORTER HAS A FAMILY REUNION THAT FEATURES MORE BLOOD

DEVELOPER Day 1 Studios PUBLISHER Warner Bros WEBSITE whatisfear.com



F3.A.R. his 133t skills

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Alma's back. And pregnant
- ✓ Co-op brings Fettel back
- ✓ Generative Scare System
- ✓ Solid FEAR action
- ✗ Co-op yet to convince
- ✗ Not by Monolith

LET'S GET IT over with: it was shit back when it began with *Driv3r*. When *Thi4f* was announced we all shook our heads ruefully. Now, we're onto *F3.A.R.* and the marketing brigade is barrelling so deep into the their fantasy of the txt-generation's psyche that we're almost at the stage where we can officially label human existence as a culturally and emotionally barren wasteland.

Or we would, if *F3.A.R.* wasn't actually shaping up to be an undeniably refreshing instalment in the franchise

that specialises in chasing spectral six year-olds.

And that is the last time you'll see *PC ZONE* calling this game *F3.A.R.* It's bloody ridiculous, so we're going with the sensible and non-trendy *FEAR 3*. And if Warner Bros complain, tough.

There is, however, something else that needs to be addressed before we descend into the slow-motion arterial spray and pyrotechnics of this, the third instalment in Monolith's franchise. Namely, that this isn't Monolith's franchise. Not anymore. It may have some of the same talent, *FEAR 2*'s

design director is on board as a creative lead, but the coding is taking place at Day 1 Studios – porters of the original *FEAR* to consoles and the developers behind so-so console title *Fracture*.

If you're nervously pulling at your collar at this precise moment you could be forgiven, but in person and on-screen everything appears to be *FEAR* business as usual. As something of a Monolith fanboy I must admit to pulling a face when I heard the news, but if there's a dip in quality in this instalment then it's not one that's currently visible in the gameplay.

ETA
**AUTUMN
2010**

A.R.

DANGER, SHOUTING AND MECHANISED POWER ARMOUR THAN USUAL

The latest choice
for a Vidal Sassoon
model was
controversial.

**"Alma Wade is on the cusp of giving
birth to something horrid..."**

"FEAR 3 takes place nine months after the enforced bump and grind experienced by FEAR 2's protagonist"

Shoot the cranberry juice cartons carried by Armacham troops for extra bonuses.

FEAR 2's healthpacks appear to have been scrubbed from the template.

My fingers remain crossed, but it hasn't stopped me smiling.

FEAR 3 takes place nine months after the enforced bump and grind experienced by FEAR 2's protagonist, and as such the terrifying psychic monster that is Alma Wade is on the cusp of giving birth to something horrid. Rift events and psychic blow-outs containing paranormal beasts are exploding out over the deserted town of Fairport in time with her contractions, while the nearby crater that was once the town of Auburn smoulders.

The seemingly limitless military forces of Armacham (armacham.com - funnily enough) continue to hunker

down and attempt to destroy evidence of their involvement in the explosion, and a FEAR team are scrabbling around in an attempt to finally destroy Alma. But it's a returning duo that are being forced back into the player-controlled limelight. This gruesome twosome are the co-op pairing of Alma's existing offspring: the original game's lead character Point Man, and the ghostly presence of his brother Paxton Fettel.

FEAR 3 is, you see, essentially *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased): The Videogame*. In single-player Fettel (killed by a bullet to the head in FEAR and reborn in the recent *Project Origin* DLC) comes along for the ride as an

invisible friend, though not a very nice one. In co-op he's present as a full-on combat partner with a full array of spectral abilities designed to complement Point Man's customary bullet-time leanings and shooty demeanour. Divergent co-op is the name of the game: a co-op experience where you can either play all friendly-like, or alternatively bait each other like complete bastards.

"Basically you're playing the game, and you're playing it

He ain't corporeal, he's your brother.

THE STORY SO FAR...
**DAY 1
STUDIOS**

DAY ZERO
Day 1 forms, taking staff from places like FASA and Activision.

2001



MECH IT SO
Day 1's *MechAssault* becomes part of the Xbox's online push.

2002



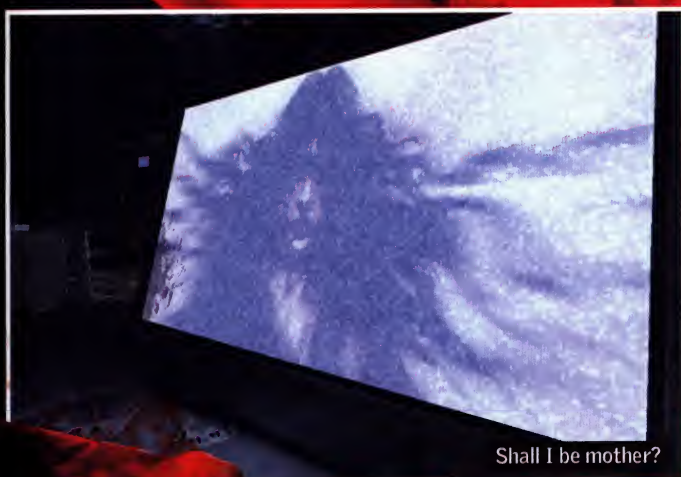
GOT THE FEAR
Day 1 are the chaps who port Alma to console-land.

2006



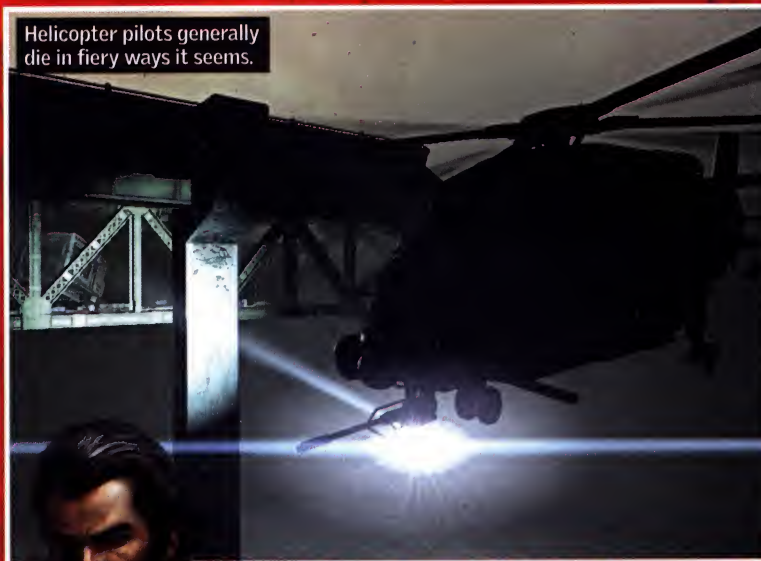
NASTY BREAK
Earth-shifting shooter *Fracture* hits consoles. World continues on.

2008



Shall I be mother?

Helicopter pilots generally die in fiery ways it seems.



MASTERS OF FEAR

FEAR: now with added horror maestros

Wanting to stamp an extra stamp of authentication on the blood-splats, jumps and more ghoulish moments of *FEAR 3*, Warner Brothers have used their cinematic muscle to get two horror specialists in on the case.

The first is Steve Niles, the writer of vampire movie and comic series *30 Days of Night*, who has been called in to co-write the storyline.

The second is... wait for it... John Carpenter – the man behind *The Thing*, *The Fog*, *Halloween* and 1962 classic *Revenge of the Colossal Beasts*.

"John Carpenter just has this vision we wanted to tap into," explains creative director Frank Rooke, when explaining the way that Carpenter was brought in for a focussed examination of the ways in which *FEAR 3*'s cutscenes (themselves a departure from the previous *FEAR*'s enforced first-person narrative) could shock and awe. "It was a close relationship, and a learning experience for both of us. We came out with it with a really good story, really good narrative."

Start praying for a disembodied head that turns itself into a crab thing and tries to eat Kurt Russell right now...



Please don't lean on the doors. Or get decapitated by a paranormal entity.

co-operatively, but you're playing it with someone you don't trust," explains executive producer Dan Hay. "We all know what Fettel is, and have an understanding of how he might play in a co-operative experience and we wanted to evolve on that. So there'll be opportunities where you'll be able to work in concert through the game, but Fettel or Point Man may choose to go out and do their own thing, or not give certain pieces of information."

How competitive play within co-op is going to work, or indeed whether it will work, is unclear – but the ways in which each character works alongside the other is undeniably classy.

Because Fettel is dead and Point Man (here seemingly played by Eric Cantona) still has blood pumping they can each see different things – there'll be visions, messages and scares that one character can see that the other will remain blissfully unaware of, unless informed otherwise.

WE ARE FAMILY

Fettel can also see barriers that he can break through in the game world that Point Man will then happily waltz past in single-player, thus providing access (should he choose to do so) to weapon stashes or entirely different passages through the next bit of the level.

As for Fettel's powers – for the most part he dashes around the battlefield with an outstretched hand delivering psychic attacks, but he can also help Point Man by either stunning Alma's creations or raising them off the ground so his brother can fill them with bullets.

Gunplay is also well within his remit though, since he can nip into the bodies of Armacham soldiers (presumably through his former psychic links to them) and use their bodies as a walking, trigger-pulling meat-shield.

So these two little boys have their array of little toys (Day 1 refuse to speculate on wooden drums) and it's genuinely rather exhilarating to see

them in action. The gameplay I bore witness to in a behind closed doors session at the recent GDC took place on a broken transport bridge, into which Point Man and Fettel crash-land a rocket pod, having escaped from a unnamed battle elsewhere in Fairport.

Originally flying alongside many other pods, looking somewhat like *Star Trek: TNG* shuttles, an explosion knocks the brothers' craft from the sky – and a cutscene unfolds in which the corporeal (and

Hopefully the *FEAR* AI will survive.

"F.E.A.R. 3 runs on a policy known as a Generative Scare System"

always silent) Point Man struggles with the G-force and the ethereal Fettel perches on the dashboard unaffected by the plunge – commenting on how it's just like old times, and berating his brother for fratricides of times past.

In the distance, meanwhile, blood-red skies swirl around an oval of light above a set of skyscrapers – the dilation of which must surely represent the imminence of

the birth of the previously mentioned 'something horrid'.

The bridge the brothers will soon be fighting through and over is of the double-decker variety – on the lower-level corpse-strewn underground trains lie piled up, while top-side Armacham troops have secured a motorway where broken concrete and burnt-out cars are the primary scenery.

At first it's a slow-paced trek along empty train carriages, but soon suspiciously chewed corpses appear, and it's not long before *FEAR 3*'s first entry in Alma's mind menagerie make their appearance.

Bursting through a buckled metro door with flames issuing from their primary orifices, these scuttling chaps are

Scavengers: an ape-like variant on the dogs that Sigourney Weaver and Rick Moranis turn into in *Ghostbusters*. They're pock-marked with fiery scars and are some heftily nimble foes: hanging from door-frames,

leaping spread-eagled at your screen and crawling on and around most of the surfaces around you.

RANDOM FEAR

When they appear and which doors they barrel from, you'll never be able to tell. *FEAR 3* runs on a policy known as a Generative Scare System – meaning that the timing and placement of enemy appearances, and often the number of them, will change from play through to play through. Whether this will prove as organic a system as *Left 4 Dead*'s Director is unlikely – but it will mean that upon quickload or checkpoint rebirth former leaps from the darkness become randomised and can happily become scary once more. Day 1 won't comment on just how far the system will go, but it seems likely that it'll be expanded into environmental hazards, individual appearances to either player and to the various in-mission cameos made by an angry pregnant woman.

Then it's up to the top level of the double-decker bridge, thanks to a scripted event in which a Scavenger leaps on board a passing Armacham helicopter, meaning that it veers down

into the exposed corridor you're moving through and has its blades whirl and chomp through the air directly in front of you. Up top various human villains are awaiting your presence – and it's here that both Fettel and Point Man can show off their newfound abilities in hiding from bullets.

Essentially the *Gears of War* cover system has been funnelled into the first-person of *FEAR*, meaning that at a tap of a key you can slide into cover, and at another you can leap over it. If you're being rushed from behind, meanwhile, you can hold the backwards key while you're pirouetting over said street furniture and find yourself facing your foes after an entire 180° about-turn. It's interesting, but it also seems faintly unnecessary when taking into account that it's a game we'll be playing on mouse and keyboard and are fairly used to taking cover without stabilisers. Hopefully the gameplay won't rely on using it.

FEAR 2's action was fairly frenetic, but in terms of sheer on-screen mayhem *FEAR 3* has it trumped – above all in co-op where double the players may not scientifically

He will neither sit, nor stay.

WE ARE FAMILY

A deeper examination of the most dysfunctional family since the Mitchells...

PAXTON FETTEL

LAST SEEN: Merging with a replica soldier called Foxtrot 813 in the finale to the *FEAR 2: Reborn* DLC, Fettel managed to come back to life. Before that the last time we saw him was when Point Man shot his prostrate body right in the face.

MOTIVATION: Unclear. Although it certainly involves a lot of cackling and the rubbing of hands together.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: A bullet hole in his forehead. Frankly, it must be a nightmare to get through customs because of it.

SPECIAL ABILITIES: Fettel can stun enemies with psychic attacks, as well possess his human enemies, running around in their bodies and using their weapons against their closest friends.

POINT MAN

LAST SEEN: Sitting in a helicopter after the entirety of Auburn was destroyed in a cataclysmic disaster, shortly after which his mad mother Alma leapt on board and the game ended.

MOTIVATION: Point Man has been called back into the fray by an as yet unnamed character that needs his help, presumably a part of a FEAR team.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: Point Man, previously something of a cipher, actually has a massive beard. Bet you never saw that coming.

SPECIAL ABILITIES: Because it looks cool and helps him pop heads in two, Point Man is blessed with a ability to slow down time and hear people shout the word 'fuck' in baritone.

LITTLE BABY

LAST SEEN: Inside Alma's tummy, as she tugged her victim's hand over to feel her baby bump. Also as an innocent sperm swimming its way into Alma's gnarled and horrid va-jay-jay.

MOTIVATION: To float in amniotic fluid, breathe oxygen and get fed nutrients through an umbilical cord and then get born. After which he/she will go to school, get qualifications and become a chartered accountant. Or watch the world burn.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: Pink, fleshy. Currently a bit grim and gunk-covered, but will probably quite cute after a fashion.

SPECIAL ABILITIES: Costs an arm and a leg. Regurgitates milk. Looks surprised when farting. Creates living nightmares through the powers of its mind that will endanger the planet.

ALMA

LAST SEEN: Doing a little bump and grind with player-controlled character Michael Beckett at the close of *FEAR 2* while the pair were encased in a magic metal ball. Said magic metal ball was located within a nuclear power plant where she used to play as a child. Strange girl.

MOTIVATION: Unknown. Although as her primary desire is to have an evil baby, which is liable to destroy the world as we know it, Alma can largely be seen as something of a threat.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES: Straggly hair. Fairly naked. Slowly walks towards you, and then OHMIGOD CLAWS AT YOU AND CLICK YOUR MOUSE, CLICK YOUR MOUSE! Sometimes an eight year-old.

SPECIAL ABILITIES: Can be anywhere, create anything and kill any creature in God's creation. Strangely unable to think of the human or monetary cost she inflicts on the city of Auburn.

Even cartoony Alma isn't a hottie.

THE F.E.A.R. FILES

Once upon a time there were two FEAR sequels on the boil – a product of a split between Monolith and Warner Brothers, and the official brand-holders Vivendi. One, Monolith's *Project Origin*, became the official sequel after the franchise name was successfully bought from the Activision-Blizzard-Vivendi publishing monster after their merger and consequent brand-pruning regime. No-one knows what happened to the other *FEAR 2*. Or do they?

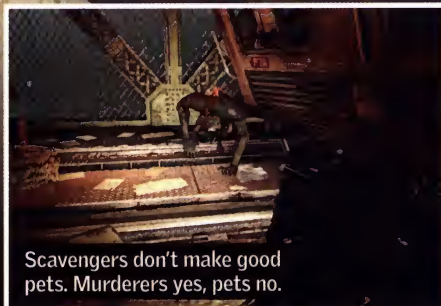
At the time of the mega-merger word leaked out that the Vivendi sequel would feature generative scares, and events such as walls that could eat your allies at random points during levels, which sounds similar to *FEAR 3*'s own Generative Scare system. What's more, back in the day Day 1 would have been the go-to guys for such a game after their console port of the original. Does the shoe fit? Well, it isn't confirmed – just a hunch.

Interesting if true though.

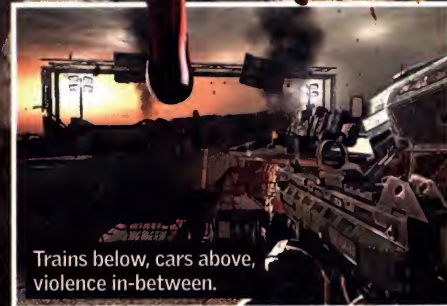
"The way that the game's run-time follows the build up to the birth of Alma's new and nightmarish offspring is a superb touch"



That explosion hides something mechanical and awesome.



Scavengers don't make good pets. Murderers yes, pets no.



Trains below, cars above, violence in-between.



REV9, greatest of all the REVs.

"F.E.A.R. 3: silly name, different developer, interesting prospect"



Paxton Fettel: Moody type, likes wearing zips.

Scavengers do great impressions of Garfield.



Cremations on public transport: uncommon.



The fact that Day 1 were responsible for the early *MechAssault* games that heralded the Xbox's arrival into online gaming does not go unnoticed here. Then, at the moment of victory over Armacham a fresh onslaught causes the bridge to tumble. It's all rather spectacular, apart from Fettel coming out with the gag, "If this is part of your plan, I'd say this is going quite swimmingly!" as Point Man sinks down into the dark waters, which does make you wonder if hired cutscene supervisor John Carpenter (see *Masters of FEAR*) is a secret fan of *My Family*.

FEAR 3 then: silly name, different developer, interesting prospect. The concept of competitive co-op isn't one that gels with the way *FEAR* plays, but seeing as so many of the co-op mechanics and point scoring systems that Day 1 hope will bring in an edge of friendly rivalry are yet to be disclosed, we'll withhold judgement. The action, however, looks more than decent – a far cry from the days of the rubbish non-Monolith *FEAR* expansions like *Extraction Point* (issue 175, 69%) and *Perseus Mandate* (issue 189, 29%) that your brain habitually flickers towards when considering such a concept.

Above all though, the way that the game's run-time follows the build up to the birth of Alma's new and nightmarish offspring is a superb touch. As for exactly what beast is clawing its way out of that accursed womb, who can say? Someone should inform social services in any case. **PCZ**

create double the fun, but it certainly multiplies death, blood, explosions, sparks and *FEAR* visual tomfoolery by a factor of two.

Throw into the mix a new brand of Armacham baddie – one with phasing and portal technology who can not only warp around the place in a shiny laser beam, but also magic up new troops through the power of teleportation – and you've got quite the light show.

Fettel, permanently shrouded in a slight red mist, can possess any of them (perhaps even the more powerful enemies as the game goes on) using the action key. When the meat sack he's inhabiting dies, it simply falls away – leaving Fettel standing there freshly exposed to bullets, but with something of a smirk on his face. It's all a bit like *Rentaghost* really, just with a man with

an entry wound on his forehead instead of a jester, witch and pantomime horse.

To gain access to *FEAR 3*'s more stompy arsenal, however, Fettel needs a host – since mech combat is making a substantial return to the game, and these bots don't come with ethereal ghost controls.

"In previous *FEAR* games you're pretty much a god when you're in the mech," explains Frank Rooke, creative director. "You could blow up anything and there wasn't much fear of damage. We're injecting that into this game: you have to play defensively, you have to play strategically."

Whereas in *FEAR 2* the mechs closed you off from the world, cocooning you in heavy armour and computer read-outs, those in *FEAR 3* are designed for more elegant combat

than the simple gut-drilling and constant rockets of times past. The mechs are slightly smaller for a start, slightly reminiscent of ED-209 in *Robocop* but probably better equipped when it comes to stairs, and come with a shield that you can activate when under heavier barrages of enemy fire.

ROAD RAGE

Their moment of glory atop the broken bridge comes in a dual-pronged assault down the motorway – with one brother taking one branch of the motorway, and the other taking the parallel route against what would once have been oncoming traffic. Helicopters are taken out, men in power-suits taking aim with rockets are disposed of, and very little tarmac goes without being either scorched or bullet-ridden.

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PCZONE

Reviews

Our verdict on the latest PC games

PCZONE swears

- ✓ To only review code signed off by the publishers and the developers.
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- ✓ To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason.
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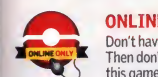
CLASSIC
(90%+)
Games scoring in this bracket are air-punching, heart-soaring triumphs. Buy them.



RECOMMENDED
(75-89%)
Head-turning, if not eye-popping, games. But then, who wants their eyes popped?



DUMP
(0-19%)
PCZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shrink our duty.



ONLINE ONLY
Don't have an internet connection? Then don't waste your time with this game: it won't work without one.



EXPANSION PACK
See this and you're going to have to get the original game first. We know, but life's not fair.



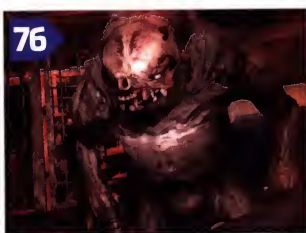
ON THE DVD
Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.



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COMMAND & CONQUER 4: TIBERIAN TWILIGHT

Has the finale to the Kane saga really killed off the franchise?



76

76 METRO 2033

Throw *Call of Duty* and *STALKER* in a blender and this is what you get: Russian FPS excellence.



84

84 STARGATE: RESISTANCE

The missing *Stargate Worlds* MMO means we're left with this shooter. Unfortunately.



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89 RISE OF PRUSSIA

Some truly hardcore strategy for newcomers to the truly hardcore strategy genre.

80 SILENT HUNTER 5

The deepest of sub sims returns. But can incredible realism actually make a game that's fun?

86 M.U.D. TV

Imagine *The Movies*, with bobbleheads and without the fun, originality or movies.

90 STATE OF PLAY: PORTAL

We round up what's been going on with GLaDOS since she first captured Chell.

82 DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS - AWAKENINGS

Have BioWare set the gold standard for all DLC to come, with this expansion?

87 FLOTILLA

THE SETTLERS 7: PATHS TO A KINGDOM

83 DAWN OF WAR II: CHAOS RISING

The add-on that adds Chaos to the Space Marine mix, and makes *Dawn of War II* playable.

88 PRISON BREAK: THE CONSPIRACY

Terrible spin-off that's far too long in coming.

92 BUDGET

The latest and best cheap re-releases as well as the pick of recent retro releases.

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The PCZONE Machine

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C17 (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, head down to the internet and type the following into your browser: xworksinteractive.com.





And that's pretty much the maximum unit count. Sigh.

Marauder

352 / 700

COMMAND & CONQUER 4: TIBERIAN TWILIGHT

Alec Meer takes on the mightiest of slapheads



DEVELOPER EA LA
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE commandandconquer.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £35

AT A GLANCE...

C&C with plenty of Kane but no base building or harvesting.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Intel Core 2 Duo/AMD 64 X2, 1GB RAM (1.5GB Vista/7), 256MB Shader Model 3 graphics card. Constant internet connection.

HOW IT STACKS

DOW2: CHAOS RISING 90%

STARCRRAFT II 86%

COMMAND & CONQUER 4 60%

KANE SOUNDS LIKE he's got a bit of a cold. He doesn't sound authoritative, he doesn't sound frightening, he doesn't sound like an omnipotent being from beyond time. Hell, he doesn't even sound like a mad dictator with hair issues. He just sounds like an overworked guy with a blocked nose. This, then, is how 15 years of the *Command & Conquer* universe takes its final bow.

Lest that sound a bit cruel, *C&C4's* failure to reach the heights of its predecessors is not face-of-Kane Joe Kucan's fault. If anything, he's the only tolerable actor in this, who, in the few moments the script makes sense, tries to add a little subtlety to a character who's previously been a pantomime villain. His distractingly less-than imperious voice is just the final straw in a massive haystack of lousy production values and even lousier plotting.

This is the end of a long-running *C&C* storyline. EA promised us we'd find out who Kane is and what he really wants.

We don't. We get some more hints which simply repeat what's gone before, and a big dumb cliff-hanger which doesn't give any closure. The supporting cast, all newcomers to the story and actors you won't recognise, are either a) annoying, b) terrible, c) constantly crying, or d) annoying, terrible and constantly crying.

RET-CONNED

If you've been following *C&C* story, in all its campy, contradictory and clearly made up as it goes along glory, since the early '90s, then you may not have the

highest expectations of its storytelling ability. Even so, this so-called conclusion will leave you thumping your desk and reading angry letters containing the repeated use of the word 'disgusted' as it comes to its final, woeful cutscene.

Long-running sci-fi has a habit of ending unsatisfyingly, but unlike, say, *Battlestar Galactica* (which, in music and in sets, *C&C4* borrows hilariously liberally from) and its silly religious finale, this doesn't even try to give answers. It's poppycock of the highest order. You heard me: poppycock!



It almost looks like a real C&C game here.



This is the brown map. It's quite different to the grey map.



The Unlock, or "wasted hours" screen.

"It's poppycock of the highest order. You heard me: poppycock!"

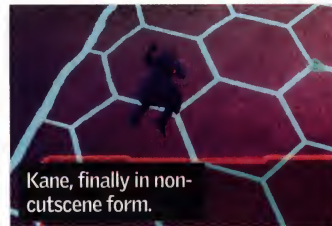
There is, of course, much more to this game than videos starring a bald guy with a small beard. C&C is the populist father of real-time strategy games, and the longest-running series in the genre. Presumably, this is just the same-old build a base and go bash another guy's base routine, right? Absolutely not. This isn't so much throwing the baby out with the bath water as it is drowning every other baby on the street in the process. Take away the cutscenes and there's no way you'd guess this is a C&C game. Base building and resource collection is gone,

replaced by a class-based system centred around re-spawning Crawlers.

These huge machines are both factory and major unit, varying in build options and ability depending on if you opt for Offence, Defence (Ss and have changed to Cs to protect innocent British minds) or Support class. No tiberium or power is necessary to spit out their pitifully small armies of soldiers, tanks, planes and robo-suits – simply time. A bafflingly small population cap means you'll very rarely field more than a dozen units, so 5v5 multiplayer



Angry GDI lady is angry.



Kane, finally in non-cutscene form.



Don't those robo-scorpions know laser pointers are illegal?

THE JACKIE KHAN OF STRATEGY

The many fatal wounds of Kane



FIRESTORM: IN THE BRAIN!

Kane apparently merged with the rogue AI known as CABAL. Crazy fans have an explanation for why this had no bearing on later games.

C&C: IN THE FACE!

Ol' chrome dome is apparently atomised by a GDI ion beam at the conclusion of the original C&C – but returns with a funky cyber-mask in *Tiberian Sun*.

C&C4: IN THE HEART!

Or thereabouts. This is probably a spoiler, but c'mon – since when is "Kane gets shot then is OK" any kind of surprise?

C&C3: IN THE ENTIRE BODY!

More ion beam-based fun, this time exploding a giant liquid tiberium bomb in the temple big K's holed up in. He shows up again, unscathed, shortly afterwards.

TIBERIAN SUN: IN THE TUMMY!

He's impaled on a piece of metallic something-or-other by Michael Biehn in the game no-one calls C&C2.

The giant oil pipe is the end-game boss. FACT.



Matches are your only hope of seeing anything like the scale of olden C&Cs.

It's important to be clear here: this is not an inherently bad concept, and EA LA's intentions are worthy. You don't need to memorise build orders or make constant beelines for tiberium fields. You just need to build an army and throw it at various prescribed points on the map.

The strategy comes from ascertaining which units are best for any given fight – pretty strict rock, paper, scissors stuff – and which capture point to send them to. The simplicity of building, and the fact your Crawler can re-spawn, means pretty much anyone can manage to kill some

stuff, and in doing so earn some experience points.

GRIEF, WHY?

Ah, XP. And so we come to C&C4's second critical failure. Levelling up and unlocking new stuff is all the rage, says Gary Greyson, Man In The Grey Suit With The Grey Computer Full Of Grey Spreadsheets About Money. Thus, all games should do it. Even if they're not at all suited to it. This isn't like *Dawn of War II*'s *Diablo*-compulsive loot system – it's about unlocking the units themselves. Want a Scorpion tank? Tough. Not until you've played as Nod for about five hours. How about a GDI Mammoth? Yeah, give it a couple of weeks.

These are not lovely bonus toys heaped on top of an overflowing box of delights. These are the game's core units, drip-fed to you over days or weeks, and only in response to successfully killing tons of enemies and levelling up. Jump immediately online the day you buy the game, and you'll have access to about four units. Sure, hitting Tier 2 only takes



Well, wouldja look AT-AT that.

a few missions or matches, and will double that roster, but it's absurd. It's insane. It's ludicrous. It's preposterous. It's being made to wait and to work for something you've paid for, not patting you on the head for doing well. It's one thing to unlock a variant weapon in an

online shooter, but denying you access to most of the tech tree until you've put the hours in is not how RTS games work.

DEATH OF A CLASSIC

Unlocked units are supposed to provide choice instead of advantages, but that's utter nonsense. It is possible to win by swarming a Tier 3 enemy with Tier 1 units, but it's harder going and not much fun. To the game's credit, XP is earned from multiplayer, single-player, co-op and skirmishes alike, but it's still a long road to the best stuff.

As a final smack upon your red-raw buttocks, the two factions – GDI and Nod – have to be levelled up separately. You don't have to fight hard and fight well to get everything – you just have to play and wait and wait and play and play and wait, and that's incredibly boring.

Dear EA: You are total bastards. Love, everyone who bought C&C4.

Worse still, the persistent unlock system is used to justify an anti-piracy measure that's the equal of Ubisoft's always-online DRM for pure contempt.



He's clearly parked that on single yellows.

WOT NO SCRIN?

Fan service fail

Outside of Kane, there are no returning characters in *Command & Conquer 4* – and no celebrity cameos either. It's supposed to be grim and gritty rather than campy, so the story goes EA didn't want to distract players with famous faces. Unfortunately, it's a really flat story with some really irritating actors – most especially the unnamed player character's ever-teary wife, who manages to repeatedly return despite situations that should have killed her.

The really serious loss are the Scrin, the third playable faction introduced in C&C3. EA say they didn't feel they had the time and resources to do them justice, so they've been left out entirely. Given their C&C3 campaign ended with them planning a full-scale invasion of Earth, this makes no sense.

Even worse, you're repeatedly told you're fighting around the massive tower they left on Earth, but the pokey, samey maps don't seem capable of showing it. There's no sign of Legion, the Nod supercomputer that C&C3: *Kane's Wrath* was hung around either.

All told, it's a bunch of glaring holes – and what we're left with instead is a promise that the C&C website will eventually be filled with all the lore and exposition left out of the game. Ooh, HTML! Thanks!



SADFACE, KING OF SORROW

Command & Conquer, but not as you know it



SAD SMILEY WAR

Everyone is sad, thanks to a Support Class power that inexplicably is not called The Sad Ray. This basically debuffs all your enemies and buffs all your guys – it's an early unlock, and can change the course of a fight.

DEATH TO ALL!

Obviously you want to protect your Crawler, but it's a real boon in battle as well as being a builder, so don't be a total wuss with it. For instance, any of your units in range will gradually heal if it's nearby. It also spits out roughly a gazillion deathrays per nanomminute.

CRAWLING CONGREGATION

There probably shouldn't be this many Crawlers in one place. Makes the screenshot more exciting, though. In other news: no, you can't zoom the camera any further out than this.

REPAIRMEN

Engineers, the only unit all Classes share. These guys are right bastards. Have three or four of them tailing and healing a unit and you'll really struggle to nubble it. If you see these lads, take them out right away.

NOT ENOUGH

Notice the unit cap is currently 12/50. This means a) I'm not doing well and b) I've currently only got two or three units on the field, but I'm already a quarter of the way into my build limit. Madness.

No matter what mode you're in, if you lose your internet connection for any reason, you're kicked out of the game until it resumes. Progress will be lost, and train-based boredom will not be killed. Is this a worthwhile for having your XP, unlocks and scores constantly monitored and updated? The answer begins with "n", ends with "o bloody way"...

"Lose your internet connection, and you're kicked out of the game"



Looks hex-based, doesn't it? If only...

All that said, when you've played long enough to unlock a decent clutch of units and enter the fray with a bunch of people in a similar position to you, the game does feel right, turning into the bastard child of *World in Conflict* and *Company of Heroes* – it has the instant action appeal of the former and the tug-of-war of the latter.

Frankly, it's just not *C&C* without base-building and harvesters, but with the right unlocks and the right players it has a bloomin' good go at being epic sci-fi warfare. Co-operation is key, and also hard to avoid: as one vs one currently is the only way to fight entirely alone. You need a Defence player setting up turrets to guard caps, a Support guy deploying his magic powers to bail you out of a fraught fight, and you need an Offence player to get into that fraught fight in the

first place. Things clicks together when all multiplayer pieces are in place, but it's unfulfilling in single-player.

While longevity hangs upon the multiplayer mode, and the potential string of patches and DLC – aargh! – unlocks therein, the reason this game really exists are the previous title's single-player modes. People have grown up with *C&C* for 15 years; they're buying to find out what happens, and to have some neat scripted missions.

I've already banged on about how pathetic the story is, but the missions fall short too. The trouble with the new structure, regardless of its multiplayer merits, is that it permits very little variation. It's just a race to biff some other stuff on small, palpably arena-like maps. It tries to insert a little more oomph – a giant spaceship at one point, a tiny Kane pixel-man at another – here and there, but it feels limited and cheap.

Knowing that most of the developers were set to lose their jobs once *C&C4* was completed, and that this game began as an RTS that was unrelated to prior *C&C* releases it's hard not feel that this was a compromised project. If it is indeed the last gasp of *C&C* as we know

it, it's an incredibly sad way to go out. With a little more money, a little more time and a whole lot more reverence for what makes *C&C C&C*, the tiny exploding acorn underneath this confused, scrawny thing could have become a mighty oak of modern strategy. Take care of yourself, Mr Kane. It was good while it lasted. **PC7**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Capable, but not flashy

SOUND Music rips off *Battlestar*

MULTIPLAYER OK, with enough unlocks

- ✓ Tons of units...
- ✗ ...that take ages to unlock
- ✓ A novel take on RTS...
- ✗ But nothing like *C&C*
- ✗ Unsatisfying conclusion

60

Damp sticky mess



Pets in the Metro are rather unusual.



METRO 2033

David Brown isn't convinced this underground is worse than London's

DEVELOPER 4A Games
PUBLISHER THQ
WEBSITE metro2033game.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £39.99

AT A GLANCE...

Call of Duty meets *STALKER* in an atmospheric FPS set in the dark world of the Moscow Metro after a devastating nuclear war.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 Core 2 Duo processor, 1GB RAM, and a GeForce 8800 or GT220 or better graphics card with Shader Model 3 support.

HOW IT STACKS

MODERN WARFARE 2 94%

METRO 2033 80%

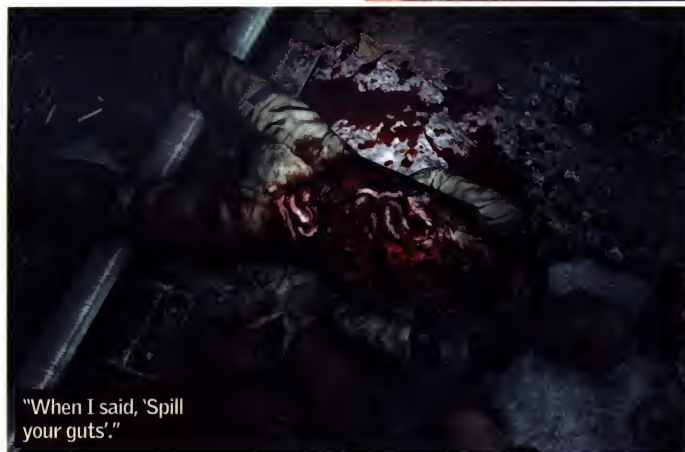
CRYOSTASIS 80%

WHEN YOU KNOW a game is about wandering around the tunnels of a large underground train system you'd be forgiven for expecting a corridor shooter. Certainly, if *Metro 2033*'s developers were a bunch of lazy sods, then that's what you'd have got.

Pleasingly, *Metro 2033* does a good job of relieving the claustrophobic tension of a subterranean life, giving you opportunities to stretch your legs on the surface. Critics will, rightly in a way, say these open-air bits are just corridors without obvious walls, but that's exactly what the *Call of Duty* games use, and that hasn't stopped them being critically and commercially successful. While *Metro 2033* isn't a classic, it's important to nip the whole "well, it's too linear" argument in the bud. It doesn't matter if a game is linear if it's presented in a brilliantly stylish, atmospheric way.

THE GOOD...

There are definitely things wrong with *Metro 2033* that bring it substantially short of a Classic award, but it's usual to first talk about what a game does right before going on to what it doesn't.



"When I said, 'Spill your guts'."

If you're going to attempt to compete with the big boys in the linear FPS genre, you've got to do something special with your scenario and nail the feel of the world right from the start. This is exactly what 4A have done, providing a world to explore that's beautiful, yet utterly bleak and terrifying at the same time. It really does look sensational at times, especially if you've got the computing oomph to use DirectX 11 and push the graphics settings all the way up to 'Very High'. It'll make your eyes bleed with wonderment,

especially when you get to the more expansive areas, like Polis. What's Polis? Ah, let's talk plot.

Based on a book by the Russian author Dmitry Glukhovsky, *Metro 2033* sees you playing as Artyom, a strapping whippersnapper who's lived in the northernmost parts of Moscow's Metro ever since a devastating nuclear conflict wiped out humanity on the surface of the Earth (at least, as far as anyone knows). Forty thousand people managed to hide in the twisting tunnels of Moscow's



"It doesn't matter if a game is linear if it's presented in a brilliantly atmospheric way"

Whoop, whoop – it's the sound of the Polis...

underground and gradually political and social ideologies made their way to the fore. Despite surviving a holocaust, the people quickly began to bicker and fight amongst themselves, turning to Nazism, Bolshevism and other political movements and grouping themselves together in different stations.

When a new threat of powerful creatures, Dark Ones, threatens Artyom's station, he's dispatched to Polis – the centre of the Metro and the grandest section of the entire system – in order to deliver a warning message to the authorities there.

For all intents and purposes, this journey is a relatively simple

GEARED UP

Know your equipment and you might just survive



MASKED MAN

The gas mask is an essential companion when you go outside, but only has a limited supply of air. Check how long you have left by glancing at your watch.



GLORIFIED G

This pellet gun can be deadly when used effectively, to do maximum damage, you need to manually crank up the air pressure, which can be dangerous in combat.



SEE THE LIGHT

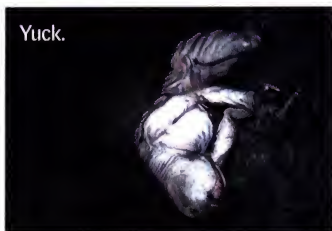
In a world as dark as this, a torch is invaluable. To make it work, you need to crank the battery. Do this regularly: you don't want it failing in the middle of a fight.



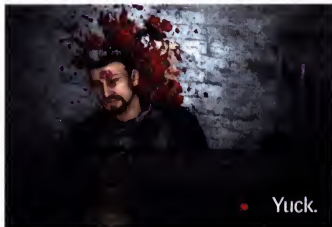
CLOSE COMBAT

This shotgun's rounds are loaded individually. Holding down the reload key is the only way your character will take the time to fill up gun. That's something to remember.

Yuck.



Yuck.



■ FPS affair. Mutant rushes you, shoot mutant, reload, move on. Just replace 'mutant' with 'human' depending on the scenario. We shouldn't pretend that, at its heart, *Metro* won't be familiar to anyone who's ever played an FPS before. The key is how it's presented, in terms of atmospheric elements, and the feel of combat and stealth. The former is flawless, a superb representation of what it might be like to exist in a world as desolate as this. The latter is where things fall down slightly.

THE BAD...

There's a slight disconnection with the bullets you fire and the impact made on enemies, apart from when you use stealth and take out enemies with one shot. When you're in a pitched battle, things can sometimes feel a bit distant, as if you don't feel like your bullets are hitting the enemies, or at least you don't feel satisfied with the impact that they are making.



Sometimes, the visuals stun you with their brilliance.

The smoothness of the combat is a key element of an FPS. It's an obvious thing really, but that doesn't stop many falling desperately short of satisfying the player. *Metro 2033's* combat isn't that bad, and sometimes it works very well indeed, but it's never as solid as a *Call of Duty*. It's best moments are when you fight humans, from which you can gauge damage and pain more easily. Think of *Crysis* and the difference between fighting the Koreans and the aliens.

Stealth missions, coupled with checkpoint saves (*Metro 2033* lacks a quick save function), is the other major gripe. Usually, the checkpoints are fine, only forcing a tiny bit of a retread, but in

"One of the most atmospheric and intriguing games of many a year"

stealth missions, oh dear. If you like to complete stealth missions perfectly (ie never be seen), the checkpoint system is a total bastard. Each reload – either voluntary after being spotted, or after being seen and promptly slaughtered – sends you miles back. When you consider the numerous ways to alert the guards – accidentally flipping your light on, broken glass on the ground etc – you can end up being terrified of moving. That's realistic

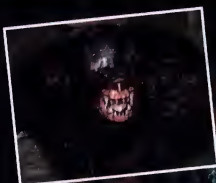
to an extent, but a bit of leeway would have been good. Or just the ability to save whenever you like. Either one would have done.

On a more technical note, the game needs a more detailed graphics settings than it has at the moment. The version we reviewed only has standardised settings – Low, Medium, High, Very High – and, tantalisingly, you can see what stuff, like ambient occlusion and other guff, gets turned on and off when

GRIME OVER TIME

The highs and lows of the *Metro 2033* underground experience

JOYFULNESS



The beginning of the game sets the tone for what is to come, with a hellish introduction to the world of *Metro 2033*. Mutants and monsters abound as you mount a desperate final defence.

As you enter into the game proper, you're given the task of taking a message to the central council at Polis station. A short train ride later and you're on your way.



You hit your first wall, a stealth mission that shoves you back a long way each time you're killed. A tangible sigh of relief is emitted when you finally muddle your way through to the end.

Back out into the tunnels, you find yourself at another stealth bit, even more frustrating than the last. Take your time, watch for the right moment to make your move and you'll be fine. Don't be afraid to run if you get caught.



Polis at last and your hard work is rewarded as you enter this beautiful station. After so long in the depths, it's a remarkably affective moment in the game. Plenty more are to come as well, as things take an unexpected turn.



TIME PLAYED



Little help?



An entry in the International Corpse Posing Championship.

you switch. But you can't change these detailed settings, at least not in-game. We suspect modders will find a way very soon after the game's release, until then we're stuck with the defaults. This causes a little bit of a problem, as Medium turns too much stuff off and High leaves too much on. It's a relatively minor niggle, as the game still looks pretty damn good on either setting.

All this complaining might make you think this is a poor game, but it's far from that. When it works, *Metro 2033* is one

of the most atmospheric and intriguing games of many a year. Nobody does despair and bleak like the Russians, and this game is no exception. If you want to see a nuclear future devoid of all hope and joy, this is where you need to come – it makes *Fallout 3*'s irradiated wasteland look like summer fields.

The experience is unique and brilliant for it, the crushing depression serving to make moments of beauty all the more important. After hours spent in the darkest of dark tunnels, the moment

when you finally get to Polis is a joyous one, made so much more so because of what went on before. More moments like this follow, but to mention them would be to enter into spoiler territory. Suffice it to say that you'll be experiencing many moments where you just want to take wonder at your surroundings.

AND THE PRETTY

If all you want to do is shoot soldiers in big generic multiplayer maps then you need to steer clear of *Metro 2033*. If you can't see beyond the obvious scenarios or are unwilling to take a detour from the well-trodden path of familiar shooter settings, avert your eyes from the screenshots on these pages. They hold nothing for you. This game is for people who like to go beyond the norm, without necessarily stepping out of their gaming comfort zones. It's a mixture of the usual and the out there, but, sadly, its fantastic features don't make up for its foibles.

This is a game where you can go from an ecstatic high to a tongue-chewing low within the space of a short chapter, perhaps illustrated best in the way the game is structured – the near-instant load times are tempered by each level being very small. There are a lot of load screens, but none of them take up more than a few seconds of your time.

Metro 2033 is a great game from a company that's never produced anything before. It's something that can

be built on and, with a couple of clever patches, even its issues can be ironed out. 4A have proved they can do it – no longer is the shortage of ammo seen in the preview builds an issue – but at the moment, *Metro 2033* falls just short of greatness. It gets an absolutely hearty recommendation from us then, but we can go no further. The Classic tunnel is blocked for now, but that's no reason you shouldn't strap on a gas mask and go exploring. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Sublime
SOUND Excellent, especially the Russian voices
MULTIPLAYER Niet

- ✓ Wonderful visuals
- ✓ Unique, exciting setting
- ✓ Incredible atmosphere
- ✓ Interesting weapons and gadgets
- ✗ Combat isn't always satisfying
- ✗ Checkpoint saves

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A tunnel vision

REVIEWS SILENT HUNTER 5: BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

Water inside a submarine is bad.

o designated area

Erich von Dobecker
OL12S

11:05 We have flooding!
11:05 Pressure hull heavily c

SILENT HUNTER 5: BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC



Run silent, run deep says *Adam Glick*, if the game runs at all

DEVELOPER Ubisoft
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE silent-hunter.uk.ubi.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £25

AT A GLANCE...

Take to the seas in a Nazi U-boat during WWII to battle planes, storms, munitions shortages and actual battles.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
3GHz Pentium Core 2 Duo, 2GB RAM, and a 512MB Geforce 8800 GTS. Internet required for DRM.

HOW IT STACKS

SILENT HUNTER 4 82%

SHIP SIMULATOR 2006 55%

SILENT HUNTER 5 49%

HERE'S HOW A submarine sim should make you feel: mad, awesome and terrified. You're piloting a tube carrying 10,000lb of explosives packed in with dozens of moist men, you're the size of a whale, and your only real defence from enemy warships is hiding. When U-boats in WWII were submerged the crews actually had to whisper to one another, else enemy hydrophones might pick them up. It's mad. And awesome. And terrifying.

Here's how *Silent Hunter 5* makes you feel: sad, let down, and annoyed. On my first patrol I hadn't travelled 200 miles when I noticed my hull integrity had dropped to 84%. This produced the same emotion you'd get driving a car away from the dealer and grazing a granite wall on your way home.

This wasn't from carelessness – I'd been floating through open waters – *Silent Hunter 5* is just the buggiest, most bizarrely unfinished title this series has ever seen. The word leaky doesn't

even apply. As if being a U-boat captain wasn't rough enough, you'll also have to deal with the assorted nightmares of a crew who won't do what you say, your ship itself not functioning properly and a high command who will, on occasions, refuse to believe that you've completed your mission. Oh, and domineering DRM that means the game quits if your internet connection drops and you lose access to Ubisoft's verification servers.

The missions are one of *SH5*'s few new features. In a relatively bold move, instead of simply picking your U-boat and year and heading off by yourself,

SH5's single-player game consists of a campaign. Throughout the game you upgrade your sub and crew from mission to mission, and even watch your crew open up to you as more incidental dialogue about their home life, hobbies or fears become unlocked.

This is all entertaining in theory but dismal in execution. The fact that you have to play through the entire campaign in order means there's no dropping straight into the 1943 era, when submarine tech and anti-submarine tech makes this whole underwater struggle more interesting.



CREW CUTS

These are the chaps you share a tube with



ERICH VON DOBENECKER

NICKNAME: Chuckles

DISPOSITION: Ornery

SKILLS: Your XO can tell your whole crew to either enter battle stations or begin silent running. I once forgot to turn battle stations off before plotting a course back to Germany, leaving my crew hunched at their posts for days.



TORPEDO OFFICER KURT FAUST

NICKNAME: The Tender Lover

DISPOSITION: Tubular

SKILLS: Faust can overcharge or pre-heat torpedoes. The former grants extra speed and range at the cost of accuracy. The latter causes more damage. No idea why though.



COOK OLAF HACKLANDER

NICKNAME: Bum Spud

DISPOSITION: Salty

SKILLS: Olaf has a passive skill which increases the whole boat's morale, and he can also whip up special meals using the ship's reserve supplies. Great for when you've accidentally left everybody on battle stations for a week.



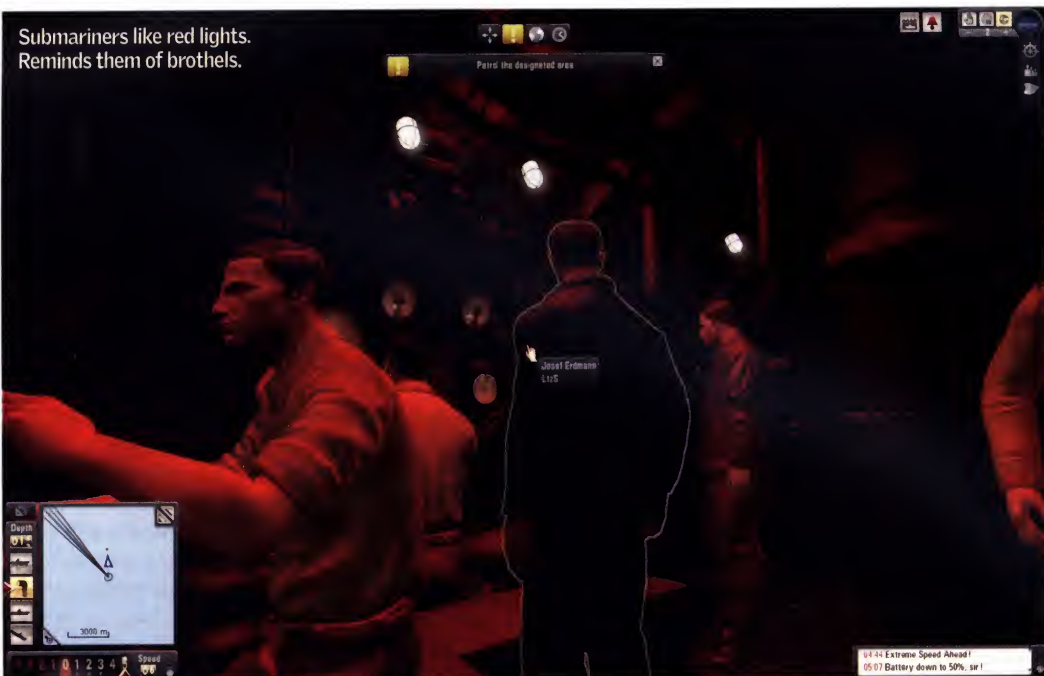
No, you're stuck sinking endless unguarded merchant vessels until the Kriegsmarine decide you've suffered enough and summon you home, skipping the plot forward another few months. And your crew have so little to say, and do such a poorly acted job of saying it, that they become cardboard vessels for your growing hate.

Why did that torpedo miss? Why can't I control the rudder directly? It's your fault, isn't it, Soundman Scheu! You're some kind of spy-bastard! I'll have you flogged!

UP PERISCOPE

Designing improvements as dramatic as 'Missions' was presumably such a Herculean effort that Ubisoft simply didn't have much energy to spend on the tutorial or interface, which are both hulking piles of crap.

The tutorial stops after you've learned how to move your boat around and fire torpedoes on unarmed ships, leaving you woefully unprepared for any



kind of combat against aggressors, and the UI is a horror film.

Controlling your ship is done via little buttons around the very edge of the screen, running straight up to different crew members in first-person view and telling them to do something to their faces, and a pop-out tactical map which has two sizes: tiny, and so big it covers the torpedo control panel.

Everything is fiddly, nothing is where you want it and in trying to simplify the information you receive the game ends up refusing to tell you certain

information you need to know. The distance between yourself and the sea floor, for instance.

The game isn't all bad though. Since the AI's equally broken you won't have to deal with the usual challenges of U-boat warfare, like merchant ships running away, planes dropping bombs or destroyers actually hunting you. So there's a relief, of sorts. There's also immediate excitement to be found in the game's brilliant U-boat vs Destroyer multiplayer game. So it's just a shame it suffers the same engine, interface, bugs and connectivity issues.

However much fun the multiplayer side of *Silent Hunter 5* is, it doesn't make up for the transparent fact that this particular sim has surfaced well before it was ready. **PCZ**

"Since the AI's equally broken you won't have to deal with the usual challenges of U-boat warfare"

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Some impressive water effects

SOUND Good booms. Bad chatter

MULTIPLAYER Available. Buggy

- ✓ Occasionally atmospheric
- ✓ Prettiest *Silent Hunter* to date
- ✗ Transparently not finished
- ✗ Miserable interface
- ✗ Restrictive structure

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Rusty shambles

Importing your character is the best way to go.



One of the new characters. The man, not the cow.



Oghren's back.



That's me.

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS - AWAKENING

David Brown wonders where all his friends went



DEVELOPER BioWare
PUBLISHER EA

WEBSITE dragonage.bioware.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

SPENDING A LONG time with a group of characters to push my rogue archer to the end of the main *Dragon Age* game, meant I got to become familiar with them.

When *Awakening*, the first proper expansion in what will likely be a long list of new material for BioWare's epic RPG, kicks off, you've got a load of new people wandering around with you. (Actually, one of them isn't new, he's just a guy from the main game I didn't care about much.) This is perhaps one of the biggest letdowns about *Awakening*, which does all the basics exactly right.

The new characters just can't replace the ones you spent so many hours with. Frankly, they're not as interesting to roam around with. As you'll be doing just as much dungeon and forest crawling as you did in the first game (25 hours worth, if the figures are to be believed) then it's a shame you'll be doing it with a bunch of people you don't like much.

But enough character assassination, *Awakening* is all about big lists of new stuff being added to the main game. And that's really what an expansion should be about: expanding on what came before. To this end, BioWare have

crammed in more than 500 new objects, two new specialisations for each class, five more recruitable characters, loads of new skills, spells and abilities, and some useful objects that were glaring omissions from the main game, such as stamina potions.

NEW DUDE

Awakening also tells a new story – intriguing, but not Earth shattering – about the darkspawn hanging after the climax of *Origins*. This means you spend the first hour fighting the same enemies you did for ages in the main game: hurlocks, grenlocks, emissaries and alphas. It's only right at the end of the first chapter that you meet the new chief bad guy who's a variation on a theme: a talking darkspawn.

Once you've dealt with him, you get to start doing the cool new thing in *Awakening*: governing your land. As the slayer of the arch demon, you get to take over the lands of a guy you killed in the main game, with decisions about funding, trade and such making up a crude management aspect. This might sound a bit rubbish, but it's surprisingly cool to feel like your efforts in the main game didn't go unnoticed.

Don't get us wrong – *Awakenings* isn't as good as the main *Dragon Age* game, but it was never going to be. It was just going to be more of the same, done the same way, with a few cherries on top (like a supply chest to keep your excess equipment in). There's the feeling that more could have been done here, but those particular cherries are nice to have, and the wealth of new material makes this worthy purchase. **PCZ**

AT A GLANCE...

First proper expansion for the epic BioWare RPG with new items, characters, enemies and an increased level cap, plus a whole new story.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
1.6GHz processor, 1GB RAM (1.5GB Vista/7), and a 128MB graphics card (256MB Vista/7). Requires *Dragon Age: Origins*.

HOW IT STACKS

BALDUR'S GATE 2:
THRONE OF BHAAL 82%

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS:
MASK OF THE BETRAYER 81%

DRAGON AGE:
ORIGINS - AWAKENING 79%

PCZONE

GRAPHICS The same
SOUND The same
MULTIPLAYER Nay, my liege

- ✓ Huge amount of content
- ✓ Lots of new stuff
- ✓ More of what you love
- ✗ More of what you didn't love
- ✗ Uninteresting characters

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For veterans only



Alec Meer makes Space Marines get their armour mucky

DEVELOPER Relic
PUBLISHER THQ
TE dawnofwar2.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £39

In *Chaos Rising* there's no more of that: missions are scripted, sculpted things, escalating fights packed with apocalyptically crumbling environments, a surprisingly engrossing story and a whole bunch of ethical choices.

and perks they unlock. The trouble is they'll lose other abilities, and access to some rather tasty armour and weapons.

Best of all, Relic have dropped an enormous patch for *Dawn of War II* to ensure that the game's player base isn't split. Once applied to *DOW2* players can face off with those playing *Chaos Rising*, without needing this expansion.

Chaos Rising a splendid next step for *Dawn of War II*, that avoids the easy route of simply fixing the last game or simply continuing on as before. It does both, and then some. **PCZ**

A standalone expansion for the divisive *Warhammer 40,000* strategy-RPG sequel. Now with more tarnishing of noble souls.

HOW IT STACKS

CHAOS RISING	90%
SUPREME COMMANDER 2	80%
COMMAND & CONQUER 4	60%

The major bullet point for this, arguably overpriced, standalone expansion is the return of Chaos and its Marines to *DOW*. These are a perverted take on Space Marines, who are more about punch than speed, and have a few demons thrown in for good measure.

PCZONE

- ✓ Best single-player RTS
- ✓ Loads of replay value
- ✓ Player base isn't split
- ✗ Too easy to undo evil choices
- ✗ Expensive

90

Dawn of War II is saved

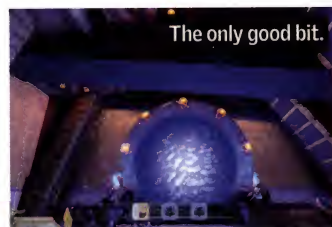


This guy fires molten globules from his shaft.

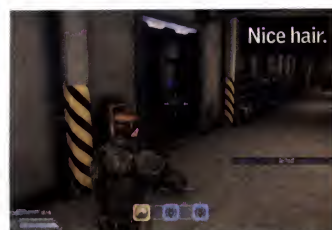


Apparently he's hitting me...

ONLINE ONLY



The only good bit.



Nice hair.

STARGATE: RESISTANCE

David Brown demands you resist the urge to spend money

DEVELOPER Cheyenne Mountain
PUBLISHER FireSky
WEBSITE stargateresistance.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £12.99 on Steam



AT A GLANCE...

Online-only third-person *Stargate* multiplayer game with very few players and very little fun involved.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a NVIDIA 7800GT or ATI Radeon x800 or higher.

HOW IT STACKS

LEFT 4 DEAD 2 94%

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 3 90%

STARGATE: RESISTANCE 18%

THERE'S USING A license to the full, like *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. Then there's throwing out a cheap, cobbled-together mess, like nearly every licensed game ever. Then there's *Stargate: Resistance*, a third-person multiplayer action game with as much charisma as a dead chartered accountant.

I'm almost at a loss for words as to how to being talking about this game, so let's start by saying that you have to endure a sign-up on FireSky's website to be able to play this game. That'd be OK if there was any other reason to go back to the site afterwards, but there isn't.

Mind you, it's a blessing in disguise, as it prevents you from actually getting into the game for a few minutes. A few more precious seconds you have to spend with your mind before it is jettisoned out your ear the second it perceives the horrid sludge erupting all over your screen in the name of entertainment. Although sometimes the best games are contained with ugly shells, this isn't the case here. The character models are woeful, making the merely average environments look far more impressive than they actually are in comparison.

The bits where you zip through a stargate are reasonable, but other than

that, only a madman would describe this shooter as visually pleasing.

Then you realise there are, currently, only three maps. Talk about spoilt for choice! However will you choose which one to play? Perhaps you'll just go for the one server that has some people playing on it. At least overpopulated servers will never be a problem with *Stargate: Resistance*.

Even when you do get to play with people, every game is eerily silent and you might as well just be playing with bots, such is the level of interaction between players. Perhaps they're all just depressed at having spent money on this cow pat of a game.

COW PAT

As an attempt at variety, there are six classes to choose from and a couple of game modes. And what exhilarating, original choices these are: team deathmatch, capture the tech (aka flag), and one called domination. The classes aren't much better, just your usual soldier, medic, engineer and sneaky spy options. Again, no real thought has gone into this, it's just a rip-off of all the other mods and multiplayer games that have flooded the market in recent years.

Mentioning mods was deliberate, because this is no better than your

average user-created experience. The difference here is it requires a pointless user account to be created and costs some money to play. If this was a free mod, which is what it feels like, then I'd be much more lenient, but this is such a cynical attempt to rake in some cash from unsuspecting punters that it can't be treated with any sympathy. By asking for money, FireSky are putting themselves up against the cream of the crop and *Stargate: Resistance* just fails miserably in almost every respect. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Ugly models
SOUND Barely noticeable
MULTIPLAYER The only way

- ✓ Nice stargate effect
- ✗ Weak to dreadful visuals
- ✗ Lacking atmosphere
- ✗ Worse than *UT3* mods
- ✗ Stupid registration

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Resistance is futile



PREPARE FOR BATTLE

CHUN LI

EZIO

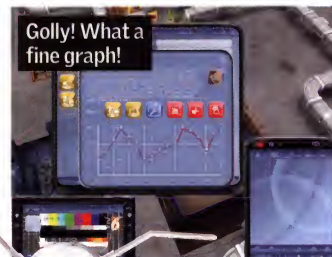
READY?

STREET FIGHTER IV VS. ASSASSIN'S CREED II

The world's biggest gaming awards are back and bigger than ever!

The Golden Joystick Awards celebrate the very best of gaming. That's because they're voted for by the people who really count - you! So, in the ultimate battle for gaming supremacy, which games will come out on top?

Street Fighter IV or God Of War III? New Super Mario Bros or Assassin's Creed II? The longlist voting opens on 4 May so visit goldenjoystick.com to make sure your favourite games come out fighting.



M.U.D. TV

David Brown wallows in a pit of his own filth...

DEVELOPER Realmforge Studios
PUBLISHER Kalypso Media
WEBSITE mud-tv.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

AT A GLANCE...

Business simulator where you control a TV station, commissioning shows and editing schedules to fulfil advertising contracts.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card with Pixel Shader 3.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

THE MOVIES 95%

THEME HOSPITAL 91%

M.U.D. TV 45%

IF YOU'VE EVER wondered what it's like deciding what shows appear on TV channels like BBC Three, look no further for your gaming satisfaction. *MUD TV* gives you the power and privilege of being a TV scheduler, entering into the thrilling world of moving things around on a screen to gain virtual viewers.

Instead of endless repeats of *Two Pints of Lager...*, *MUD TV* gives you the chance to create and schedule *Sims*-esque formless video clips which represent the shows, with nauseating bobblehead characters and a thick vein of Germanic humour running through the whole thing.

Essentially, the game boils down to placing programmes on the schedule at the best times to attract enough audiences to fulfil advertising contracts. At heart, *MUD TV*'s multiplayer adds

a tiny bit extra in terms of direct competition, but otherwise it's the same thing. One thing could have made *MUD TV* a lot better – a *Movies*-style making-your-own shows facility – but instead of anything that creative you just get looped footage of babbling bobbleheads that drives you insane within minutes, if the music doesn't get you first.

RUNAROUND

To get things done you have a character that you move into different rooms in your company's building, each room essentially representing a menu. There's a place for writers to create shows and a studio to film the finished articles, while research unlocks new rooms in traditional management game style.

The unusual thing is that to access most of the features in the game, you have to walk your character through these rooms. If you want to hire a new employee, you have to walk your guy into the lobby, go down to the bottom level of your building, walk to the worker area and then hire them. Then go back to the room you want the worker to work in and assign them to a task.

As you can imagine, this gets frustrating very quickly and is certainly an idea that works better on paper than

it does in-game. There's a certain amount of credit due for not presenting the player with an endless menus, but in the end they're all still there – it just takes longer to flick between them.

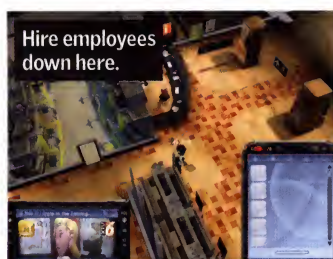
We also suppose it's designed to simulate the frantic rushing about someone at a TV station might have to do. But if realism was the aim, why use cartoon bobbleheads? **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Embarrassing bobblehead nonsense
SOUND Hellish music and vocals
MULTIPLAYER Basic competitive options

- ✓ Scheduling isn't overly dull
- ✗ Can't create your own shows
- ✗ Bobbleheads
- ✗ Moving the character is annoying
- ✗ Humour doesn't work

45
 C.R.U.D. TV





RISE OF PRUSSIA

David Brown is probably the wurst general in history

DEVELOPER AGEOD
PUBLISHER Paradox Interactive
WEBSITE paradoxplaza.com/
 games/rise-of-prussia
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

AS FAR AS historical scenarios go, the Seven Years War between Frederick the Great's Prussia and an alliance of Austria, Russia and a few other places, isn't necessarily the most exhilarating choice to base a game on. However, it gets attention because AGEOD aren't just doing yet another World War II battle simulator.

More credit is due to this French outfit, as they're formed from only two (to our knowledge) people, a bevy of

industrious volunteers, and a pro-active community who create their own games using the same engines that power AGEOD's main titles, like this here *Rise of Prussia*, *Birth of America* and so on.

These games are labours of love and so are immensely detailed on the historical side and impenetrable on the gameplay side. To be fair though, this game is much easier on the brain than AGEOD's last game (*World War One*, issue 203, 65%). I felt like I could progress beyond the easiest levels of difficulty at some point, which is something I've never been able to say before about an AGEOD title.

OLD TIME WARFARE

Each game turn lasts 15 days, with units represented by a portrait of their leader, a 3D figurine (which doesn't look as good) or a depiction of the type of unit it is (a man on a horse for a cavalry unit, for example).

Units are assigned to brigades, which are in corps and then armies, all lead by bigwig generals. It's all part of the Chain of Command, which is a concept drummed into you during the painful text-based tutorials.

They try to be accessible, but your eyes will be running down your

cheeks like egg yolks before you reach the end of them.

Other problems include an interface that has a lot of small buttons and sometimes-intrusive tooltips, combat that's as riveting as watching a David Niven film and a 'ledger' that's a massive splodge of numbers and lists – fine for the enthusiast, but to a newcomer? It's just scary. So while AGEOD maintain their fine tradition of delivering hardcore strategies, casual strategists are again out in the cold, unless they were to find it for a fiver somewhere. And, amusingly, *Rise of Prussia* is, by far, their most accessible game yet. Keep trying, guys, you may just crack it in the end. **PCZ**

AT A GLANCE...

Hardcore strategy from the makers of a slew of other grand strategy games, set during the Seven Years War.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 1.8GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR	89%
RISE OF PRUSSIA	68%
WORLD WAR ONE	65%

Old Freddy boy himself.

PCZONE

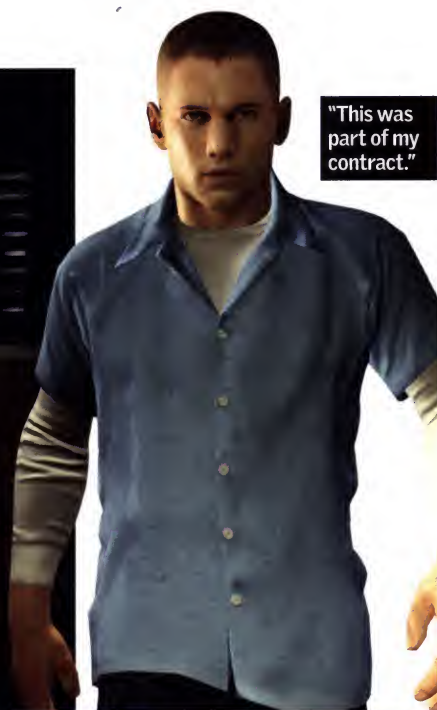
GRAPHICS Maps and portraits
SOUND Minimal, some classical
MULTIPLAYER Play-by-email

- ✓ Very in-depth
- ✓ Unique scenario
- ✓ More accessible...
- ✗ ...still less than it should be
- ✗ Text tutorials
- ✗ Reams of figures and lists

68
 No text please, we're British



A bit of stealth photocopying.



"This was part of my contract."

PRISON BREAK: THE CONSPIRACY

Steve Hogarty admires bricks, hates the rest

DEVELOPER Zootfly
PUBLISHER Deep Silver
WEBSITE prisonbreak.
deepsilver.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



Pinch him on the arse for extra points.

AT A GLANCE...

The game of the TV show, which went bad after the first season. You know, after they broke out of prison.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
2GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a
NVIDIA 7800+ or ATI X1800 graphics
card with Shader 3.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

DESPERATE
HOUSEWIVES **53%**

PRISON BREAK **35%**

LOST: VIA DOMUS **32%**

THESE ARE LOVELY bricks. In fact *Prison Break* probably has the best in-game brickwork I've seen. If you can find a better brick in another game, you can take a real brick and cave my skull in with it. Through the wonders of parallax mapping (and they are wonders), you'll feel you can almost reach out and touch each individual brick, run your fingertips along its coarse, rough-hewn surface. They're great bricks. Brillo bricks.

Everything else is a bit rubbish. In *Prison Break: The Conspiracy* you play Tom Paxton, a retroactively invented character who's been slipped into (or rather in between) events of the first season of the TV show. As such, you can have no effect or involvement in the show's main plot. You're constantly confined to the periphery of the main character's – Michael Scofield's – vision, hovering about in the background, peeking out at him from around corners and sliding out from under his bed while he sleeps. Don't let the TV cameras catch you, otherwise you'll create a universe-searing paradox.

Paxton's plot-dodging adventures lead him along a series of linear levels, each one set in and around the prison, and task him with retrieving a string of objects. Computer records, ID cards, medicine, sharp things, that sort of stuff. The stealth system can be summarised like this: press Q to hug corners, then jump when an NPC looks the other way. When you're not doing that, you're fighting, a system which can also be summarised with damning little effort: left-click for a weak attack, right-click for a strong attack, and Shift to block.

PRISON BORE

Even getting caught is a fun-less chore, as the action freezes and the camera slowly pans to the austere, boggle-eyed face of the guard who spotted you, before lobbing you back to the last checkpoint. Quick-time events break up the action in much the same way as sonorous flatulence punctuates a big poo, while mini-games like weight-lifting and underground fighting offer a meaningless and repetitive key-hammering distraction.

The real actors are used, if you were wondering, but clearly some of them are more in demand than others. Scofield's lines total five, maybe six sentences. Mob boss Abruzzi does most of the talking here, but he's hardly tier-one *Prison Break* cast. Disappointing all round. One for the brick fans only, I'm afraid. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Great bricks
SOUND Exiguous talent support
MULTIPLAYER Two player fights

- ✓ Terrific bricks
- ✓ Decent likenesses to actors
- ✗ Basic stealth
- ✗ Simple fighting
- ✗ Tedious missions

35
Inc-arse-erated



FLOTILLA

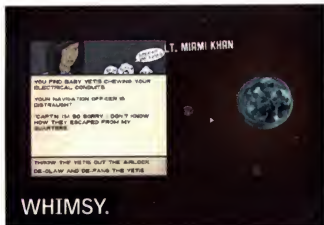
Toucan play this game

DEVELOPER Blendo Games
PUBLISHER Blendo Games
WEBSITE blendogames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$10 (about £6.70)

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a DirectX-compatible graphics card.

THERE ARE THREE amazing things about *Flotilla*. The first is that its crawling, ponderous-yet-majestic space battles are audially accompanied by Chopin, providing a hit of instant class that, alongside the game's beautifully low-fi art style, makes *Flotilla* one stylish bastard. Secondly, those space battles are carried out in a way we've very cleverly dubbed 'simultaneous'. (Don't worry, we Googled that, and nobody else has managed to be quite as smart as us).

What our invented term means is that both you and the AI choose your actions for one 30 second turn – planar movement, vertical movement, orientation and priority targeting – before they're all carried out simultaneously. Entry level strategising requires guessing where your opponent is about to move. More advanced players can worry about guessing where he's guessing you're guessing he's going. Weaknesses on ships' flanks mean that orientation and weapon range are also important.



Thirdly: utter whimsy. Between battles you encounter short text-form scenarios. Your choices here trigger events further in the story. Allow the toucan stowaways aboard, and they might steal some technology. Salvage a haunted ship and you might get stalked by a Brumak. It's nonsense, but it tinges *Flotilla* with wonderful humour.

You eventually succumb to space illness, so properly developing your flotilla is impossible. And the scenarios repeat themselves after subsequent adventures. This leaves *Flotilla* without any goal, or a feeling of progression. Stylish, funny, but sadly disposable.

Steve Hogarty



THE SETTLERS 7: PATHS TO A KINGDOM

All roads lead to roam



DEVELOPER Blue Byte
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE thesettlers.us.ubi.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £35

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz processor, 2GB RAM, 256MB graphics card with Pixel Shader 3.0. Constant internet connection required.



WATCHING THESE GAMES are almost as much fun as playing them, and that's not a back-handed compliment. There's something so calming about watching *The Settlers'* little cartoon people building their houses and living their lives, even when you know you're meant to be getting worked up about Ubisoft's DRM. Look how cute they are! Who cares that having to be online for the single-player is the worst idea since laxative bath salts?

Luckily, it's multiplayer that takes the focus in *The Settlers 7* anyway. As ever, the basic idea is still to build villages, set up a functioning economy and expand your influence to the heathen realms not yet under your iron glove, but this time that's the start. Winning is all about getting Victory Points from goals that can be anything from having the biggest civilisation to being the first to conquer an important landmark. There's no way you can pick up all of them, turning a

series that's often been as slow as continental drift into a battle where every click counts – a scrap for points that can be stolen, a race to be first to others that you're positioned to grab.

The catch is that keeping all these balls in the air means an absolute ton of very German micromanagement, and *The Settlers 7* isn't great at warning you if you've screwed up. This complexity isn't necessarily a problem, and there's a very solid game underneath, but definitely trust your gut to tell you if its pretty juggling act will be your thing.

Richard Cobbett



State of Play

Increasingly developers tinker with their creations long after their release. With this in mind, every month we cast fresh eyes on the changes seen in long-running games...

For a taste of the update: find the radio here.

THIS MONTH...

PORTAL

PUBLISHER Valve DEVELOPER Valve

WEBSITE whatistheorangebox.com PRICE £13.99

AN UPDATE TO *Portal* arrived recently, the patch notes of which read: "Changed radio transmission frequency to comply with federal and state spectrum management regulations."

The jargon-heavy sentence was easily overlooked, just another note atop a list of previous updates whose changes are too banal to even register: "Updated the particle rendering code and particle data files to make them compatible with the particle editor included in the Source SDK", says one, "Updated the engine to report SteamIDs using the Steam_0 format instead of Steam_1," another.

You'd be forgiven for not noticing that Valve had just added a string of 26 new puzzles to their space-bending cult

classic, kick-starting a breadcrumb-chasing mystery hunt leading straight to the doorstep of a sequel announcement. The *Steam* forums noticed, obviously, and set about dissecting every new audio file, dialling into BBS boards and phoning up Gabe Newell's mum. They'd pretty much cracked it within 24 hours.

HOLE IN THE SKY

Watching that mystery unfold was entertaining enough, but what of *Portal* itself? Is the update – an achievement requiring you to find 26 radios dotted about the levels, and bring them to a location, guided only by static audio, to tune into some morse code – an interesting addition in itself? Or is it essentially just a carrier for an



The addition presents its own puzzles.

How do I get Johnny Vaughan on this?



"Forces you to rethink the basics of the FPS genre"

89% – Steve Hogarty, PC ZONE #187

interesting press release? Should you actually bother going back to do all this stuff, now that the enigma's been drained away?

Well, this is no lazy update. Each radio is very deliberately placed, either in plain sight or obscured by test chamber furniture. In the latter case, you'll have to listen out for the jazzy reprise of *Still Alive*, tracking it carefully in stereo as you gently spin around the test chamber like an echolocating dolphin or person-sized bat. Glados does not afford you the simple luxury of an ear-trumpet.

Once you've found the radio you need to take it to an unmarked location inside (or later on, often outside) the chamber. This is the most difficult part of the job, as your aural compass – a static noise as you approach the required location – only comes into effect once you're relatively

close to your goal.

This is also the time when you'll appreciate just how finely honed Valve's otherwise meticulous design process is, by virtue of this achievement not having had the typical Valve sheen applied to it. Signal locations are often cruelly placed in odd locations, serving only to frustrate as you blunder backwards through levels in search of that static buzz.

CLEVER GIRL

What's far more important than a few errant hotspots is the broader nature of this update, a sequel announcement delivered via the original game. Seeing all of Valve's systems come together to serve as an announcement vehicle shows a frightening degree of co-ordination, and hints at a fascinating new means of interacting with a captive audience.

Now who put that there?

At no other time could this have been done: it needed a single platform to which Valve could deliver an update that would be applied simultaneously to all of the game's users, it needed an achievement engine to drive players towards solving the riddle, and it needed a forum to allow a thousand people to write a million words about exactly what the hell was going on.

Two days later, another update: "Added valuable asset retrieval." With this Valve change the game's epilogue, effectively placing a question mark after "The End".

With that, Valve have announced *Portal 2* (page 46), stoked their gaming community into a state of hysteria, and they've got everybody chasing stale cake again. Genius. **PCZ**

VERDICT

A sequel announcement that shames any PR and marketing team's efforts, and leaves the original game better off for it. Go back and play *Portal* now.

Steve Hogarty

THE STORY SO FAR... PORTAL'S ASCENDANCE



2005

The little acorn from which *Portal* grew is the forever-lauded game *Narbacular Drop* by Nuclear Monkey.

2006

When Valve like something, they barge in and take it. The *Narbacular Drop* team are scooped up and put to work on *Portal*.



2007

Portal is out, and doesn't receive a great deal of updates. Probably due to its size and single-playeriness.



1 MARCH, 2010

A sudden update added the unusual radio-grabbing achievement, to the delight of many obsessives.



3 MARCH, 2010

Update "Added valuable asset retrieval", changing the ending to allow for the announcement of a sequel...



11 MARCH, 2010

Valve's Gabe Newell gets the Pioneer Award at GDC. A fake BSOD drops yet more *Portal 2* hints.

Budget

Showing signs of age? Dropping your prices? Jon 'Log' Blyth is interested...

HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC V

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE mastertronic.com PRICE £4.99

IT'S STRANGE TO think that *Heroes of Might & Magic V* came out just four years ago. The *Might & Magic* brand has been around for 24 years, and despite reinventing itself every now and then – *Dark Messiah* was an enjoyable distraction, for starters – the brand still feels slightly tainted by the dusty associations of old-school fantasy role-playing.

We didn't rate it so highly at launch, but the fifth edition of the real-time strategy arm of *M&M* ages surprisingly well. Perhaps it's because the bugs have been patched. Perhaps it's because the budget price lowers your expectations. Perhaps it's just a plain trick of the

mind – but with a pinch of nostalgia and such a minimal cash outlay, *HOMMV* becomes a pleasure to re-explore.

As you'd expect from a mature universe, the game is set in a well-imagined and detailed fantasy world, that has six factions: the decent and corrupt wizards of Academy and Necropolis, high and dark elves from the Sylvan and Dungeon factions, with humans and demons taking their opposite places in the same way Human and Chaos do in *Warhammer*. (How vain are we, that wizards and elves can be pitted against evil versions of themselves, but humans need to cast themselves

**BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**

against something dead poetic?)

Each faction plays differently enough to make their own campaigns interesting, and there are dozens of hours of satisfying *Warcraftian* strategy to be wrung from the single-player game.

On top of that, the game's looks and musical score have withstood the test of time. That is, if you can call four years any kind of a serious test of time. So, at its new extremely low price, the musically abbreviated *Heroes of Might & Magic V* gets a belated recommendation from ZONE.



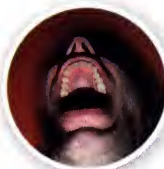
**THIS
MONTH
PCZONE
SAVED MONEY BY...**



Steve had two fillings on the NHS. **SAVING** £850 on a full Ebert jaw replacement



Log bought one can of Relentless and tipped it into 10 Red Bull shot bottles. **SAVING** £18.31



Dave slammed his dick in a drawer instead of buying more crack. **SAVING** £1,500 on crack



The powerful ice-piss attack.



That's mine. Haha! I said... where's everyone gone?



Lordi's new outfits were less rubbery, more polygony.

**PCZONE
75
Worthy warfare**

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3 DELUXE

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE mastertronic.com PRICE £999

WHEN ARE THEY not re-releasing *Tycoon* games? Do they put the prices back up, every other month, just to drop them again, creating an exciting new presence on the budget scene?

I can see you looking sheepish, over there, *Zoo Tycoon*. Stop whimpering and show me your price tag. I knew it! You're budget, but I bet you'll be back on some

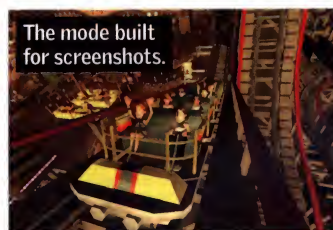
new release list in the next couple of months. Well don't come here for a review, or I'll take the piss out of your zebras.

Still, at least *Rollercoaster Tycoon 3* is one of the good ones, and having the expansion packs included are a bonus. For the time, the ability to ride your coasters in full, breathtaking 3D was

something of a fun gimmick, even if you did have to simulate G-forces by playing the game in the back of a convertible BMW. And to this day, making a fairground that causes miniature people to become over-excited and vomit is its own reward.

This is damn good example of the overfilled Tycoon genre, so if you've somehow managed to get this far in life without buying it six times at varying prices, you should probably buy it now.

PCZONE
80



The mode built for screenshots.



Always check for vomiters.

EMPIRE EARTH III

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE mastertronic.com PRICE £999

WHEREAS GAMES LIKE *Heroes of Might & Magic V* have improved with time, *Empire Earth* has become less appealing. Where effort was made in fairly pointless touches, such as

buildings that collapse semi-believably, Mad Doc lobotomised the series.

We've nothing against streamlining, but technically the human body could be streamlined by removing the arms and

legs, and that's essentially what they've done here. Then they've thwacked the head with a frying pan, which has mucked up elementary RTS elements such as pathfinding.

Empire Earth III isn't abysmal, it's just a pale shadow of previous games – if you're determined to dig around in the past, go one step further and play the first two games. They're both available in the budget shelves as well.

PCZONE
60



Dulux combat: battleship blue...



Blues and Reds – will they ever get along?

AND THE REST...

Three dirt-cheap golden nuggets you should definitely own



VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – REDEMPTION

\$6 (£4), gog.com
Debugged. Fantastic! Essential.

92



GABRIEL KNIGHT 2

\$6 (£4), gog.com
This FMV point-and-click adventure puts similar efforts to shame.

80



CAESAR III

\$6 (£4), gog.com
Engrossing and well-imagined empire-building and town management.

90

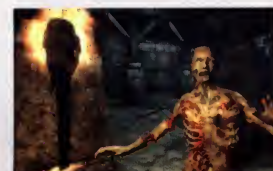
PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET GAMES



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

£10, White Label

The historical RTS game that set the standard for others to follow. Buy it, if only to try out the excellent mods.



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION GOTY

£14.99, Steam

The sequel to *Morrowind* features the massive open-world gameplay expected from *Elder Scrolls* games.



COMPANY OF HEROES

£9.99, Steam

A challenging yet fun, WWII RTS that sees you playing Axis and Allies in the days after the D-Day offensive.



PSYCHONAUTS

£10, Steam

You won't have more fun than this psychological platformer unless *Brütal Legend* appears on the PC.



MASS EFFECT

£12.99, Steam

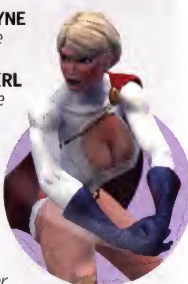
The definitive space opera RPG/shooter. A must-play, especially before you start *Mass Effect 2*.

Buyer's Guide

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

PCZ TOP 5 SHAMELESS CLEAVAGE

- 1 **FEMALE DARK ELVES**
Warhammer Online
- 2 **BLOODRAYNE**
BloodRayne
- 3 **POWER GIRL**
DC Universe Online
- 4 **LARA CROFT**
Tomb Raider
- 5 **TRISS**
The Witcher



PCZ TOP 5 CRAP MOD-SPAWNERS

- 1 **UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003**
- 2 **ELDER SCROLLS: MORROWIND AND OBLIVION**
- 3 **MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR II**
- 4 **LEFT 4 DEAD**
- 5 **HALF-LIFE 2**



PCZ TOP 5 MOST POPULAR MMOS*

- 1 **WORLD OF WARCRAFT**
11.5million subscribers
- 2 **AION**
3.5million subscribers
- 3 **RUNESCAPE**
1.4million subscribers
- 4 **LINEAGE**
750,000 subscribers
- 5 **LINEAGE II**
750,000 subscribers



* Data from mmodata.net

FPS



HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES

PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)
Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.



LEFT 4 DEAD

PCZ Issue: 202 - 93%
The only thing the we like more than killing zombies is killing zombies as a team. And that's what L4D provides: a chance to scream with your buddies as you kill endless amounts of mindless and murderous plague victims.



TEAM FORTRESS 2

PCZ Issue: 187 - 93%
Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together the best of online shooters and topping it all off with superb animation that rivals the best Pixar's films.



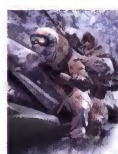
LEFT 4 DEAD 2

PCZ Issue: 214 - 94%
Basically, this is Left 4 Dead in the Deep South. Except this one has new modes, new infected, new campaigns, as well as machetes and chainsaws for some serious slice and dicing. Better than the original.



FAR CRY 2

PCZ Issue: 201 - 90%
A triumph of non-linear gameplay, Far Cry 2 offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this well-realised, you won't care.



CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2

PCZ Issue: 215 - 94%
Take all of the greatest action movies of all time, stick them together, and add some semi-manufactured controversies, and you have a massive hit. Still, it's an absolutely great shooter.



BIOSHOCK

PCZ Issue: 185 - 96%
Despite the recent sequel having better gameplay, BioShock is still the superior game. Enter a destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.

STRATEGY



EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 205 - 94%
Vast yet manageable, accessible yet hardcore. All four words and more describe the best Total War game money can currently buy. With the addition of dramatic sea battles and an extended global campaign map, there's simply nothing else with the same grand scope that remains as easy to get into. We feel that the only game that will topple this game from its perch as the best strategy game around will be the next game in the Total War series. It really is that good.



COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%
With this game Relic took the best bits from RTS games and left out the crap, creating a game that's accessible, taxing and exciting. And its expansions Opposing Fronts and Tales of Valor keep the action coming.



WORLD IN CONFLICT

PCZ Issue: 186 - 92%
A stunning RTS set during the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign that combines great gameplay and a good story, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
A Buyer's Guide without a Civ game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy in the expansion packs Warlords and Beyond the Sword.



SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE

PCZ Issue: 193 - 91%
This startling beauty of an RTS seemed to come from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 175 - 91%
A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

ACTION/ADVENTURE



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

PCZ Issue: 203 - 91%
We PC users have had to wait a while (OK - we had to wait a bloody age) before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Belic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of GTA4 adds graphics that are a cut above those seen on the consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor, to Liberty City's free-roaming world and the sure-to-be-classic storyline of Bellic's American dream becoming an American nightmare.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%
Payne is getting old, but it shows how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a growling voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that this is still a force to contend with.



ASSASSIN'S CREED 2

PCZ Issue: 220 - 90%
Travel around Venice and Italy, meet Da Vinci and make friends with some prostitutes, run along walls and kill lots of people. It's Assassin's Creed, but with all of the kinks smoothed out, and plenty of depth added.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%
Murder most foul, and you're the killer. Fahrenheit boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings.



PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%
Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and off its rocker - Psychonauts is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%
We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillis is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

PCZ Issue: 213 : 89%
Proof that licensed superhero games don't have to suck, Arkham Asylum's mix of action, RPG and stealth-em-up play makes it a near classic. The best Batman game we've ever seen.

MMOs



WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 – 95%
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth as a living virtual world doesn't disappoint. While its graphics are dated, it's beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 182 – 87%
A near-perfect recreation of Tolkien's tales, with solid combat and engaging plots, in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! Middle-earth awaits...



WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING
PCZ Issue: 200 – 92%
Mythic slips *Warhammer* into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PvP'er will launch themselves into huge open warfare, and drop into temporary group quests.



GUILD WARS
PCZ Issue: 156 – 94%
How to make a gaming accessible to the masses. A lot of thought has been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home, thanks to a totally skills-based setup.



EVE ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 130 – 88%
Elite Online has been a long-held fantasy for old school gamers, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy.

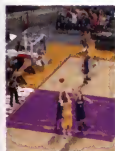
SPORT



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010
PCZ Issue: 214 – 88%
Every year sees another *Football Manager* appear to break up relationships across the country. But while *FM2010*'s updates mean it still holds the top spot, *Champ Man* is closing in.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2010
PCZ Issue: 214 – 85%
The football industry may ignore *PES*, but *PES* doesn't ignore PC users. This year's *PES* includes updates from the console release, something that *FIFA 2010* can't claim.



NBA 2K10
PCZ Issue: 214 – 90%
Something of a niche product in the UK, this remains a fantastic sports game. Forcing you to use proper basketball tactics during matches that look like they're really on TV, *NBA 2K10* proves it's the top of its league.



FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE
PCZ Issue: 205 – 85%
All the joy of *Football Manager* with added MMO fun. Build your own team from scratch and develop your manager's skills, to let you take on other managers around the world.



CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010
PCZ Issue: 214 – 80%
With a new 3D match engine, and new features like the set piece creator, *Champ Man 2010* has jumped up in quality. While it still can't match *FM2010*'s depth, it's far more accessible.

SIMULATION



X3: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get reunited with the *X Universe*?



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 – 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



THE SIMS 3
PCZ Issue: 209 – 92%
The Sims 3 is like having your very own reality TV show in your PC, and just as addictive. Near complete freedom of gameplay lets you be a vicious deity, a benevolent dictator, or just a creepy voyeur.



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 – 89%
The latest (and maybe final) in the *Flight Simulator* series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING
PCZ Issue: 213 – 90%
Like its peer *ArmA II*, *OpFlash 2* aims to bring realistic warfare to your PC. But unlike its peer this game doesn't forget it's meant to be fun, not some kind of military training aid.

ROLE-PLAYING



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
PCZ Issue: 167 – 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay, put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard and live with your mum to enjoy RPGs.



FALLOUT 3
PCZ Issue: 201 – 91%
While it does play like *Oblivion* in a sci-fi skin, this is a great open-world that's just as entertaining if you just wander across Washington state than if you follow the plot. And DLCs are adding to its greatness.



DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS
PCZ Issue: 214 – 93%
By delivering an RPG that's at once realistic, brutal, heroic, sexy and immersive, BioWare have secured their position as masters of the RPG genre. We're already eager to see what they'll do with *Dragon Age 2*.



MASS EFFECT 2
PCZ Issue: 218 – 93%
Darker in tone than the original, but featuring refined... well... everything, *Mass Effect 2* is a near-perfect mix of third-person gunplay and RPG storytelling. Just make sure you play *Mass Effect* first.



DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 – 94%
This is the benchmark in RPGs – if not gaming. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of the PC gaming world.

DRIVING/RACING



GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 – 92%
Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.



COLIN MCRÆ: DIRT 2
PCZ Issue: 214 – 90%
The new rally game bearing the name of the deceased driver is a stunner. A successful mix of an arcade racer and simulator, that has most sumptuous graphics of any racer around. This sequel is going to be tough to beat.



BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX
PCZ Issue: 205 – 89%
This game has set the standard for online arcade racers. Packs more speed than a drug dealer and more fun than slapping a bag full of Jonathan Rosses and Russell Brands.



RACE DRIVER: GRID
PCZ Issue: 195 – 88%
Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the TOCA and creates a movie-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges. Kind of like *Burnout*, but with proper tracks.



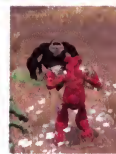
NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT
PCZ Issue: 213 – 84%
The *Need For Speed* series gets serious. Well, not too serious as the game is still weighed in the favour of fun over realism. But this is a polished release, and the best *NFS* around.

RICHARD'S PICK

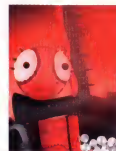


THE WITCHER
PCZ Issue 188 – 88%
Being an old-time P&P RPGer – the kind which involves rolling funny shaped dice and talking to real-life people in person – I've always enjoyed CRPGs. But none have met my expectations since *Baldur's Gate II*. That is until *The Witcher* arrived.
This game from then-unknown CD Projekt was plainly stunning: based on Andrzej Sapkowski's original reworkings of fairy tales and standard Tolkien tropes, this game featured intense tactical combat, drugs, sex, and – most importantly – a damn good story.
The Witcher's setting is a world where morality is a complex, shifting mass that lacks any clear definitions of good and evil. This is a world where an antihero is the good guy by default. By forcing you to choose between taking the side of medieval Nazis, literally inhuman terrorists, or staying out of the conflict and allowing a civil war to break out. *The Witcher* forces you to consider your actions and their effects. And not just on the wider world – each choice you're offered has a personal consequence for you in the game: help a woman out early in the game, and you get an ally later on; choose the wrong lover, and you make an enemy.
And boy, were there a lot of women. In various states of nakedness. As well as threesomes with eager nurses. Yes, *The Witcher* is a truly great game.

ODDBALL



SPORE
PCZ Issue: 199 – 95%
This is four charming mini-games and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should experience it yourself.



WORLD OF GOO
PCZ Issue 201 – 90%
A stroke of indie genius, *World of Goo* is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unique and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, this indie title is simply irresistible.



PORTAL
PCZ Issue: 187 – 89%
Ingenious and absurdly funny, *Portal* is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.



GARRY'S MOD
PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%
The God game-like *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.



BRAID
PCZ Issue: 209 – 90%
Braid is extremely pretentious, but extremely well made, with time-bending twists that'll provide a challenge to new and veteran platformers. It also has a secret editor for making your own levels.

DAVID'S PICK



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010
PCZ Issue 214 – 88%
While doubters would decry it as being merely a spreadsheet or, if they're being kind, an "animated spreadsheet", they're clearing missing the point of why these games are so compelling to play. If you think of it being like an RPG then perhaps you'll come closer to understanding it. And if you factor in the fact your imagination has a lot to do with why you can enjoy something that, yes, does look like a swishier version of *Excel*. It's the emotional bond you form with your mental image of the players in your team that connects you to the game.
Like a good book, *FM2010* goes beyond the mere dry presentation of facts and figures. Overanalyse the game and you miss the point, just like trying to interpret or explain why a classic book is saying what it says drains all the life from it. You might also want to think of it as a strategy game too, where your efforts are put into defeating an opponent using the information you have to hand.
Essentially, you've got the most comprehensive football database in the world, licensed by Premiership teams, coupled with an increasingly lush visual aspect that belies its spreadsheet origins. Yes, you're just watching a load of stick men running around on the screen, but if you break any game down to that level, they become absurd. It's a great game and there's reason why so many love it.

INCOMING!

Want to know what's coming out? Then turn to page 18 for the full run-down.

VIDEOGAME CULTURE

EDGE®

NINTENDO | SONY | MICROSOFT | PC | HANDHELD | COIN-OP | ONLINE

MOVE

First
PlayStation
Move games
playtested

THE NEW CONSOLE WAR
How Sony's PlayStation 3
motion controller is taking
a swing at Wii and Natal

THE SECRET WORLD
The truth behind Funcom's
dark modern-day MMOG

RESIDENT EVIL 4
Reliving the nightmare
with creator Shinji Mikami

REVIEWED
Splinter Cell: Conviction,
Red Steel 2, Dead To Rights

ISSUE 214 ON SALE NOW



PCZONE Hardware

Better gaming through technology

HOW MUCH!?!

I'VE RETURNED FROM a purveyor of well-known German automobiles and I've had to sit down. It wasn't the coffee, nor the besuited ape who spent several minutes summoning the energy to rise from his desk and greet me. No, it was the cost of satellite navigation.

There are plenty of arguments as to why you'd want Sat Nav as an option in your car, the most obvious – and also the most compelling – being that it's always there. You don't have to remember it, it can't be stolen, and your wife can't go and lose it.

Seventeen hundred quid! The ape brushed some imaginary dirt from his lapel and explained that was the going rate for such a device, so I asked if he had a PC at home. He adopted a happy, faraway look, and then began rattling off tech specs as easily as the alphabet.

We played the nerd game for a bit, and I then made the point that the hardware in his PC made the hardware in this car (pointing) look like a train set. All that money yet the car's system still had a look and feel from the '90s, and its 30GB storage capacity was dwarfed by the Flash drive in my pocket.

Seventeen hundred quid? What for? The one my wife last had wasn't anywhere near as expensive, but it offered voice recognition and Bluetooth. Ah, replies the ape, forgot to say: Bluetooth is another £880.

I didn't buy the car. Though I did replace my missing TomTom.

Wandy

Phil Wand
Hardware editor

HURT UNLOCKER

ASUS awakens dormant cores on AMD chips

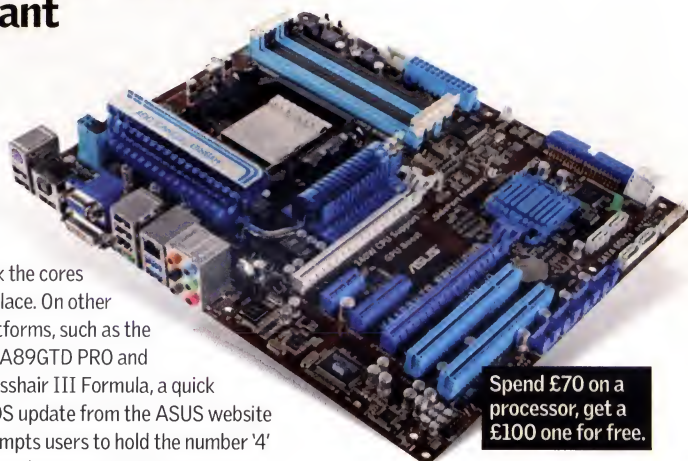
THE NEW ASUS M4A89GTS Pro has a rather amazing feature: flick a switch and it turns your dual or triple-core AMD processor into a quad core processor.

Also available on all ASUS M4-series boards and on the company's other AMD 800 chipset products, Core Unlocker enables the BIOS to access additional processor cores on certain AM3 chips. Nothing is guaranteed in such matters, of course, but anyone with a dual core Phenom II – such as the bargain 550 Black Edition – would be mad not to see if their X2 has been hiding its X4 under a bushel.

On the M4A89, a pair of DIP switches on the edge of the board itself

lock the cores in place. On other platforms, such as the M4A89GTD PRO and Crosshair III Formula, a quick BIOS update from the ASUS website prompts users to hold the number '4' during boot up, at which point Core Unlocker starts working its magic.

There are of course many reasons why you'd want four cores rather than two or three – the most obvious being multitasking performance. ASUS also



Spend £70 on a processor, get a £100 one for free.

claim that by increasing the core count, users can also get more than 100% better overclocking performance as well.
uk.asus.com

SERVICE PACK 1 4 7

Update for new Windows due soon

MICROSOFT HAS BEEN spilling the beans on *Windows 7 Service Pack 1*, due for download within the coming months.

The company explained that *Service Pack 1* would be a comparatively small affair containing only minor patches, some of which users will have already received through automatic updates.



What it will deliver is an updated *Remote Desktop* that takes advantage of *RemoteFX*. This technology allows users to watch full-quality video and graphics over a network.

It's really only a matter of time now before your home PG moves to the loft, or even to a secure, off-site location, and you play games remotely from anywhere in your home – or indeed anywhere in the world.
microsoft.com/windows7

NEWS ROUND-UP

PANASONIC ARE BUNDLING their new TVs with NVIDIA's 3DTV Play software that enables PC games to be displayed in – you guessed it – 3D. Together with a HDMI 1.4-compatible 3D TV, you'll need a compatible GeForce card, some goofy-looking glasses and either *Windows Vista* or 7. Not to mention some motion sickness tablets.
nvidia.com

AFTER THE 2005 relaunch of the once-illustrious Commodore name in Europe, Commodore USA are launching an underwhelming C64 clone powered by last year's Intel hardware – the Phoenix. You can get details on this retro-looking all-in-one computer at the equally retro-looking Commodore USA website. Names from history should be left where they belong, otherwise it won't be long before marketing people revive all the old brands.
commodoreusa.net

WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS

BY JON 'LOG' BLYTH

CFX: What you hear when you hold a shell up to your ear. **QUAD CORE:** A form of robust, off-road pornography that takes place at moderate speeds, yet still manages to cause the deaths of many British teenagers. **FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** In 1994, Michael Stipe asked: "What's the frequency, Kenneth?" The lack of a self-contained answer in the song lyrics led to furtive speculation, and we are still waiting Kenneth's official response. It's believed that the answer, when it comes, will be the location of a radio station that plays all thriller, no filler. **FORCE WARE:** A hooded cape.

Dear Wendy

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...

PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *World of Warcraft* so long your partner's left you? Wendy can't help with those setbacks, but we can solve all your hardware hassles. Wendy knows all, and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including details about your problem and system specs.

Q AUDIO PHIL

I've been looking to buy replacement speakers for my PC. I don't need more than two channels as past experience has shown it to be a needless mess of wires, and I've surround sound headphones set aside for that. (They do a better job anyway!)

I'd like to avoid a subwoofer if possible, as it's just another box taking up useful space, but a stereo headphone input is a must. I listen to music just as much as I play games, so I'm after a premium quality set and have set



All good things come in pairs.

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 10.1	27 Jan 10
NVIDIA	Force Ware 196.21	19 Jan 10

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	X-Fi Beta 2.18.0004	30 Jul 08
Creative	Creative Alchemy 1.20.04	01 Aug 08
Creative	Audigy Beta 2.18.0001	17 Jul 08

myself what I think is a reasonable budget of £250. Is there anything you can recommend?

Phil Dorney

A For £250, the world is your oyster. I would start by checking out Logitech's £60 Z-10s, simply to challenge any belief that you need to throw money at this endeavour in order to get the best product – it's not necessarily true.

The Z-10s are small and elegant and don't have the clutter of a sub. They also have a 3.5mm headphones input and integrate with Windows media players to display track information. The audio quality is warm and rounded, though at just 15W they're never going to be room fillers.

I'd then check out the M-Audio's Studiophile AV 40s, the best sub-£100 speakers bar none, and then Acoustic Energy's Aego Ms, though these do use a sub to help them sound better than everything in their price bracket.

At the top of the shop, to my mind, there's only one choice: the £249 Audioengine 5. These will blow both your socks and your underpants into the next room, though I still question spending so much, when so much of your listening is apparently done wearing headphones.

Q CORE DUMPED?

My current system is nearly four years old, though I did spend £600 on upgrades a while back. It features

Intel's Q6600 processor, 3GB RAM, 250GB hard drive, 750W power supply unit and two 8800GTs, all held together by an ASUS P5N-E SLI motherboard. I'm currently using Vista.

I'm looking for advice as I'm saving up over the next few months to improve my system – though I'm not sure if a new PC would be more cost and performance effective. The system is currently holding its own, but as newer PC games arrive it'll probably feel the strain.

I don't have a specific cost ceiling in mind, but certainly no more than £1,000. I note any upgrade would require a new

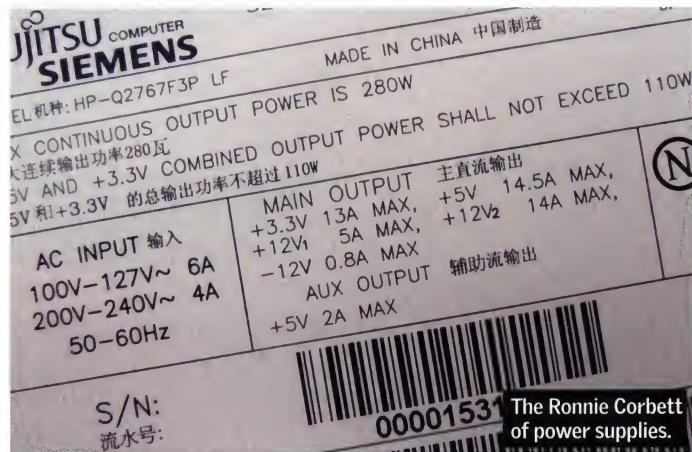
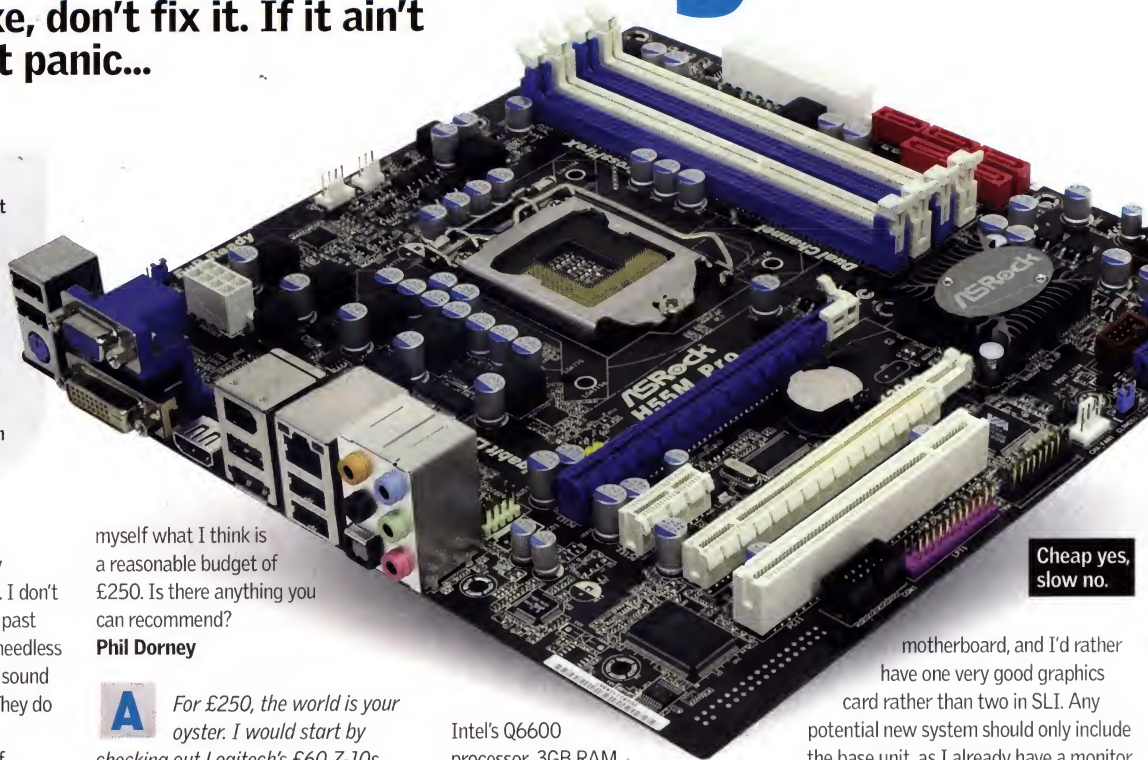
motherboard, and I'd rather have one very good graphics card rather than two in SLI. Any potential new system should only include the base unit, as I already have a monitor.

Can you please let me know if a new system or an upgrade is the best choice, and also if upgrading to Windows 7 is also recommended?

Adie Dewsbury

A In all honesty, the setup you have now is a fine, solid, middle-of-the-road PC. By that I don't mean that it's mediocre, just that I recognise it as a configuration that would've felt close to untouchable when new, and even today will be more than capable of dealing with almost

Cheap yes, slow no.



"A PC that's clean of malware and behind a modern router isn't going to be taken over by hackers"

anything you throw at it. You said as much in your letter.

What it isn't is very expandable. That ASUS motherboard isn't going to support recent Core 2 speedsters, such as the Q9650, and if you do decide to stick with an old nForce platform, you'll be forever missing out on newer, better hardware such as the Core i5 750. This is a processor which is not only a match for the Q9650 in terms of benchmark results, but is also a good £100 cheaper. Everyone has a soft spot for Core 2, but there's no getting around the fact it's getting long in tooth and short on breath – particularly where cutting-edge gaming is concerned.

In your shoes, I'd probably spend £80 on ASRock's top value H55M-Pro. It's the cheapest H55-based mATX mobo available, but unless you know precisely why you might want to spend £200 or more on a willy-waver model instead, don't.

Next, get the retail box of Intel's i5 750 processor for around £150, being sure to avoid its pricier 'S' variant, and then spend £200 on Corsair's 4 x 2GB DDR3 1333MHz XMS3 kit. And today Windows 7 64-bit is a must.

Finally, treat yourself to a Radeon HD 5870 for around the £300 mark, and if you can, keep the 250GB drive for data and get Intel's 80GB X25-M solid state drive for your system and applications. Just make sure it's the second-generation model – it'll have 'G2' in the model number and cost in the region of £180.

As for the chassis, that's such a personal thing I couldn't possibly advise you, though my choice would be Supermicro's 731D-300B. Simple, handsome, with world-class build quality, it's a joy to work on.

"Finding a new CFX unit for your case would be an impossibility"

Q MONKEY BUSINESS

I have a Fujitsu-Siemens E3510 PC with a Core 2 Duo E4600 processor, 2GB of DDR2 RAM, and a 500GB hard drive, all of which is running Vista Business. It's worked great as a work PC and also as a light gamer, its Intel GMA 3100 allowing me to play games like *Sid Meier's Pirates!* and *Evil Genius* with few problems. I've never pushed it to its limits but I'm guessing that running *Empire: Total War* or *Mafia II* at high detail levels will be beyond it.

The obvious solution would be to put a dedicated graphics card in, such as the Sapphire Radeon HD 5750 (or 5770) Vapor-X, something that would run quiet and allow me to continue using it as a work computer. However, on closer inspection there is no free six-pin – or indeed, any pin – power cable to feed a graphics card. I don't think it can take a larger PSU.

I save monkeys for a living [regular readers will know this, and will have visited savetheorangutan.org.uk to offer their help. Haven't you? – Ed] which doesn't pay well, and so have around £200 to solve this problem. Can I make this PC run the likes of *Mafia II* at high-ish spec, or am I stuck with games dated before 2005?

Paul "Monkey Bloke" Johnson

A The E3510 is a 'small form factor' PC. What this means is that while the motherboard has a PCI-Express x16 slot for you to add a discrete graphics card of your choosing, the fact your PSU has less than the requisite number of wires is the very least of your worries.

To start with, you're going to need a low-profile GeForce or Radeon card just to fit inside that slimline case.

ALL ABOUT...

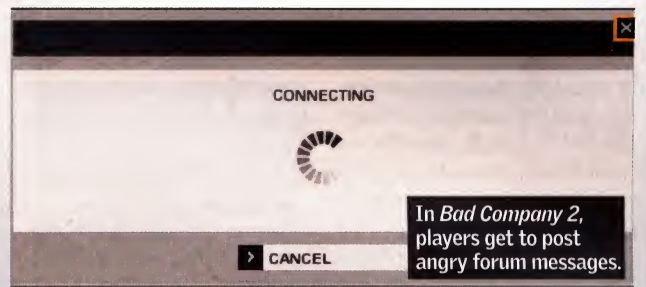
26 CANNOT CONNECT TO EA ONLINE

A revolutionary new multiplayer game engine, developed by a team of monkeys and used in the *Battlefield* series, is taking the online community by storm.

First used by DICE in *Battlefield: Bad Company 2*, the *Cannot Connect to EA Online* engine gives tens of thousands of players single-click access to other games they've paid good money for and which actually work, except for *Bad Company 2*. A new set of open communication protocols – dubbed networking – allow gamers to login at any time and from anywhere and always achieve the same result.

In addition, the engine provides a strikingly accurate simulation of every other *Battlefield* release from the last six years, the stark message box and 'Cancel' button reminiscent of that dismally chaotic, predictably disorganised world where nothing works and everyone wonders what'll happen a short time from now when two more cash-in titles have been released and nobody can be bothered supporting the old ones.

Anders Server-Outage, lead developer of the *Cannot Connect to EA Online* team, told us, "Can you repeat that? I'm driving my sports car."



The fastest 'half-height' card on sale today is AMD's £70 HD 5570, but while this should prove noticeably faster than any onboard solution, it's still a way behind the comparatively dreamy performance offered by its bigger brothers. In titles such as *Mafia II* (which won't be out for some time) I'd expect the 5570 to turn out frame rates roughly on a par with the 9600 GT from two years ago, and you'd still need to keep most settings low to enjoy the game. ~

The power supply is another problem entirely. While you could replace it, finding a new CFX unit for your case – one rated at 450W or better, with the amps in the right places and with two PCI Express

connectors – would be an impossibility. Even if such a beast existed, you'll never escape the fact that you'll be cramming a hot video card fed by a hot power supply into a tiny case with probably less than 15 litres of air inside it. In short, everything's going to cook.

Having said all that, the Radeon HD 5570 will at least allow you to play the modern games you want to play, albeit without the elaborate levels of detail you were probably hoping for. In addition, you won't need to change your supply, and you can put the remaining £130 from your budget towards your next PC. Because once you've fitted that new card, there's nothing more you can do. 🐵

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(8bit) I've heard hackers can gain access to your PC by scanning for unprotected ports on your PC but I don't get how. (Tetras) Ports are how programs communicate over networks, so if your PC is listening on a particular port, it could receive stuff. Without a way of exploiting that access there isn't anything that can happen. (Wandy) Tetras is right. A PC that's clean of malware and behind a modern router isn't going to be taken over by hackers. Problems arise when your PC listens on ports (like when you host a game server) in which case a hacker could exploit vulnerabilities in the server's code. Visit www.grc.com and run ShieldsUp! to see what vulnerabilities exist. My guess is none.

WE ARE PC DETECTIVES

When we test PCs we look for the following things: **SPEED:** We use benchmarking software on all desktop systems to see how fast they'll perform in real-world situations. The better the performance, the higher the score. **COST:** A PC that performs as just well as a model that costs twice as much, is going to score highly. **INSIDES:** We check that wires and cables have been tucked away neatly, everything is plugged in correctly, and that the case and cooling system aren't going to fall apart if you sneeze near them.

YOYOTECH FI7EPOWER MLK3

PRICE £5,500 MANUFACTURER YoYoTech WEBSITE yoyotech.co.uk

THIS IS EASILY the most expensive PC we've had the opportunity to play around with. Thankfully, given the incredible outlay, it's also the fastest. But is the MLK3 PC really worth that much money?

If you're asking that question, then you can't afford the MLK3. But if you're a fairly clued-up member of the PC community this machine isn't for you either. This is a rich kid's technological check list. Top-end CPU? Tick. Ludicrous amounts of high-speed RAM? Tick. Multiple DirectX 11 graphics cards? Tick. Loads of storage? Tick. Multiple SSDs in RAID? Tick. So you won't be surprised to hear the MLK3 is nothing like value for money.

While this PC will be lightning fast in six month's time, and its Bloomfield chipset means it'll accept six-core Gulftown processors, you don't need to spend £5,500 to get this performance. Especially if you're looking at this

BENCHMARKS

GPU PERFORMANCE fps @ 1680 x 1050

FAR CRY 2*	84
DIRT 2*	68
WORLD IN CONFLICT*	72

* DirectX 10 test * DirectX 11 test

SSD PERFORMANCE

MAX READ	555MBps
MAX WRITE	169MBps

SPECIFICATION

CPU	Core i7 975 3.33GHz @ 4.14GHz
MOTHERBOARD	ASUS P6TD Deluxe
MEMORY	12GB G-Skill DDR3 2133MHz @ 1,866MHz
GRAPHICS	ATI HD 5870 2x
STORAGE	2x 80GB SSD, 2TB HDD
OS	Windows 7 Ultimate 64-bit

machine from a gaming perspective. Today's latest games run brilliantly on old graphics cards because of their console origins, so you're not getting five times the performance of a £1,000 rig here.

"There's nothing you could do with this PC that you couldn't do with one that costs half the price"

The reason for this is that the MLK3's two HD 5870s can trash any gaming benchmark you put in front of them. These two cards cost £530, and they'll happily outperform the twin-GPU ATI Radeon HD 5970 (issue 218, 83%), which is the same price. They could be dropped in a sub-£1,000 PC with a suitable PSU, and you'd get nearly identical performance figures as with the Fi7epower.

The Fi7epower does resemble a baby Cylon.

Similarly the Core i7 975 Extreme is the fastest CPU available, and it's overclocked to 4.14GHz. But they'd be little difference in the real-world to using a Lynnfield Core i7 870 – a chip that's half the price.

That said, the performance from the dual Intel X25 SSDs set in RAID is jaw-dropping: read speeds are well over 500MBps and 4K writes at 131MBps. Sadly, the time needed for the rig to go through POST checks and the RAID config, means boot times aren't cut.

Basically, there's nothing you could do with this PC that you couldn't do just as well with one that costs half the price. Owning it is like having a Lamborghini and being unable to ever take it above 70mph.

And like the Lamborghini, the MLK3's BMW-designed chassis does look all kinds of funky. The case may cost over £500, but it does some interesting things. Separating out all the

basic components, so the PSU, storage drives and chipset never interfere with each other, means you can more efficiently control the cooling process.

That said, a £500 chassis should have far superior build quality to this. The boxes that house the PSU and optical drives feel flimsy, and there's far more movement in them when they're locked in place than there should be. And the designers should have come up with a more elegant solution to the optical drive caddy scratching the case's matte black surface, than a couple of bits of black insulation tape.

Knowing something about PCs' and components' relative performances, we could put together a machine for half the price with the same benchmarks as this. But that would require effort and this machine asks for none. **DJ**

PCZONE

78

Speedy and pricey

SENNHEISER RS 160

PRICE £140 MANUFACTURER Sennheiser
WEBSITE sennheiser.co.uk

WIRELESS CANS BROADCAST using FM, which has a much lower resolution than CDs and is affected by background interference.

These wireless headphones from Sennheiser transmit audio at CD quality (44.1kHz, 16-bit). The difference is dramatic: crystal-clear sound without the slightest hint of hissing and pulsing.

SPECIFICATION

RANGE	20m
FREQUENCY RESPONSE	18Hz-21,000Hz
OPERATING TIME	24hr
POWER (HEADPHONES)	2x NiMH-Akkus (AAA)
POWER (TRANSMITTER)	5V DC or 2x Alkali-Akkus (AA)



The headphones are also superbly comfortable even during long listening sessions. But we're not fans of the integrated volume controls – they're a little bit fiddly, especially for larger fingers – and they're also a bit lacking in bass.

The RS 160s are very good, but if you're already looking at premium headphones, get the RS 170. They've got more bass, volume, quadruple the range, and a smart docking station. **GM**

PCZONE 80



MIONIX NAOS 5000

PRICE £64.99 MANUFACTURER Mionix WEBSITE mionix.net

A NEW MOUSE always takes a bit of time to get used to, especially if you're fond of your current rodent.

So one of the most important things a pointing device needs to do is feel comfortable and not exhibit strange foibles that push you back towards your original clicker. The Naos 5000 does the latter.

Features-wise, it's flawless enough: it has configurable weights, huge DPI (one of three levels, that are selectable mid-game), and five main buttons and two side buttons to provide ample options for refined control – but it feels a bit strange.

Otherwise, there's nothing really to criticise – maybe with some more programmable buttons for MMO obsessives – but other than that, it's as good a mouse as you'll find. But not one that'll suit everyone. **DB**

SPECIFICATION

BUTTONS	7
RESOLUTION	5040dpi
WEIGHT	106g

PCZONE 80



ALBATRON OTM

PRICE £250 MANUFACTURER Albatron WEBSITE albatron.com.tw

ALBATRON'S OPTICAL TOUCH Monitor uses infrared light, optical sensors and reflective bars in its frame to track fingers, instead of a touch-sensitive screen. This only adds a small premium to the price of the actual monitor.

We tested the screen using *Touch Pack for Windows 7*. The monitor and software proved responsive and tactile, which is all you can ask. But without the pack, icons and navigation buttons are too small to cope with fingers, and only *Internet Explorer* had any touchscreen features.

Really this monitor is a gimmick. It'd be good if you hide the mouse and keyboard of a PC based in a kitchen, but on a desktop it's a waste. **DJ**

SPECIFICATION

TYPE	Active matrix TFT
SIZE	21.5in
NATIVE RESOLUTION	1920 x 1080
RESPONSE RATE	5ms

PCZONE 82

IİYAMA PROLITE E2710HDSD

PRICE £235 MANUFACTURER Iiyama WEBSITE iiyama.co.uk

THIS IS A TN LCD, but superior to those of past years: colours have more range and saturation, and contrast and black levels aren't diluted greys. Yet it still falls short of IPS and PVA screens.

Colours invert when the panel is viewed from above horizontal and can be inaccurate, as this panel can't render many, pixels jump constantly between two hues to replicate a third. And while the blacks are better than older TV panels', they're far from inky.

Inputs are limited to a DVI and a VGA port. The chassis is a cheap and hollow-feeling affair, and the tilt-only stand is flimsy. Not a good pick. **JL**

SPECIFICATION

SIZE	27in
ASPECT	16:10
NATIVE RESOLUTION	1920 x 1080
RESPONSE	2ms

PCZONE 75



Hardware Buyer

This is our favourite PC gear – both expensive and cheap

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

ASUS RADEON HD 5970

PRICE £499
uk.asus.com

The Radeon HD 5970 is the world's fastest video card, making it an obvious choice for our top slot. Under that ugly plastic shroud are twin AMD RV870 chips, whose 4.3 billion transistors and 3,200 shader processors knock the GeForce GTX 295 out of the stadium and into the parking lot. Despite all this power it's not even particularly noisy when under load. If you have one of these cards you'll need at least a 600W PSU. Add another and you'll need 1KW.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE I7 975

PRICE £770
intel.com



The most extreme, most unlocked edition of Intel's quad core, multithreading flagship processor laughs at all modern games. The only reason not to get one is the imminent Core i7 980X, which will have six Hyper-Threading cores and 12MB Smart Cache and be even more jaw-droppingly stunning.

SCREEN

HP LP2475W

PRICE £450
hp.co.uk



You can buy a 24in widescreen monitor for £150 these days. So why would you want this one? Simple: professional H-IPS screen technology, two DVI-I ports, DisplayPort, HDMI, six USB ports, height adjust, rotate, swivel and tilt, plus 1920 x 1200 pixels to stare at. Why not buy two?

MOTHERBOARD

ASUS RAMPAGE II EXTREME

PRICE £259
uk.asus.com



ASUS claim the Rampage II Extreme is the "ultimate overclocking board", and looking at the design and specification it's hard to find a more attention-grabbing mobo. It has a massive array of tweaking tools, and you get a SupremeFX daughterboard with a X-Fi processor thrown in.

SOUND CARD

AUZENTECH X-FI FORTE 7.1

PRICE £119
auzentech.com



There was a time when you couldn't build a PC without a Sound Blaster. Today it's all handled by mobos and only fruitcakes buy discrete hardware. Oh really? The Forte is mad for games like nothing else: Dolby Digital Live, DTS Connect, even headphone and mic amps. Proper stuff.

HDD

WESTERN DIGITAL CAVIAR BLACK 2TB

PRICE £220
westerndigital.com



Forget solid state for a moment: we're after a data tanker that'll swallow music, movies and your Steam folder. For that there's only one choice: the WD2001FAS. Don't be fooled into thinking that large drives are slower than smaller ones. This 2TB model is top of the HDD benchmarks.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH Z-5500

PRICE £249
logitech.co.uk



We've been advocating Logitech's THX flagship since it was launched in 2005, and although the silver plastic does tend to make it look a little dated alongside new rivals, the simple fact is that great sound never goes out of fashion. Nothing rivals the Z-5500s at this price.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

SAPPHIRE RADEON HD 5750 VAPOR-X

PRICE £115
sapphiretech.com

While you could save yourself the cost of a game and buy NVIDIA's GTS 250, Sapphire's HD 5750 is faster, almost silent (courtesy of Vapor-X tech) and brings cool technology within reach of most gamers. Features such as DX11 support, ATI Eyefinity and DisplayPort connectivity simply aren't available on any GeForce. And thanks to CrossFire, the upgrade path is obvious: buy the same card twice.



PROCESSOR

AMD PHENOM II X4 955 BLACK

PRICE £122
amd.com



With the faster 965 Black at £139 and Core i5-750 at £152, spending that extra £30 on Intel's little belter will sure put a wider grin on your face. But when £30 could buy your hard drive or a set of speakers, and you're on a tight budget, it has to be the Phenom.

MOTHERBOARD

GIGABYTE GA-MA770-UD3

PRICE £49
gigabyte.com.tw



Available for less than £50, GIGABYTE's GA-MA770-UD3 supports AMD's most recent AM3 processors including the Athlon II and Phenom II X4, X3, and X2, and DDR3 RAM of up to 1,666MHz. It also features RAID and onboard eight-channel HD audio, but there's no CrossFire support.

HDD

SEAGATE BARRACUDA 500GB

PRICE £33
seagate.com



Seagate's 12th generation ST3500418AS drive costs peanuts, but a decent capacity means it'll cater for most media collections and a nod to the enthusiast market means it'll turn out some of the best benchmarks going. There are good reasons why it's the world's most popular desktop drive.

SCREEN

IYYAMA PROLITE E2208HDS-2

PRICE £134
iyyama.co.uk



Cheap and unknown brands are often tempting, but many are based around yesterday's technology and won't support connections more exotic than a 15-pin analogue VGA. Which is why we'd go for this 22in Iiyama, with DVI-D, full HD resolution and integrated speakers.

SOUND CARD

NONE
PRICE £0
N/A



If you're strapped for cash, the last thing you want to be wasting money on is a sound card. It's simply not necessary. Every mainstream motherboard on sale today offers multi channel audio, so hook up your speakers there instead. You'll never notice the difference.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH X-210

PRICE £25
logitech.co.uk



Another win for Logitech, a brand people still associate with mice. The X-210s are great value, and despite looking and feeling every inch the £25 speaker set, deliver sub-assisted audio that transcends their budget status. At this price you might find classier speakers, but never a more classy sound.

GG?



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PLAYED ON 360 + PS3!

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The first drive + a career
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UNOFFICIAL REVIEW!

GOD OF WAR 3

HANDS-ON!

ALAN WAKE

ALL-NEW!

Fallout NEW VEGAS





PCZONE

Freeplay

Mods, maps and free things!

LIFE OF GAMES

I USED TO love football, talking about it all the time at a previous place of work. When you're surrounded by people who take an interest in something you like, it's natural that you invest more of your own time into that hobby than you otherwise would.

Now, I'm coming very close to actively disliking it. I won't get into why, but a substantial degree of blame has to go to my current existence, in which I spend all my time playing and writing about games. It comes back to environment: at Zone Towers, I've got very little contact with in-depth football discussion.

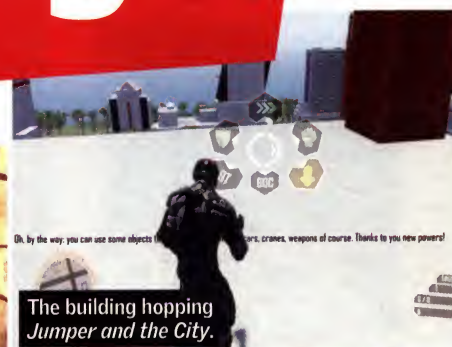
Games are a pervading influence in my life. I come to work, I play, talk and write about them. When I go home, I play, talk and, if deadlines are tight, write about them. My housemate plays, talks and writes about them, and my current circle of acquaintances... well, you get the picture. Environment is very important when it comes to what you fill your own time with.

Everyone goes through phases of interest too, such as getting into a TV series and eschewing other forms of entertainment in favour of that. Then you might discover the glory of the latest Slayer album and bang goes the TV watching. However, games have been, and always will be, a constant for me. Unless my arms fall off and they haven't invented telepathic control methods when it happens.

So, while my interest in football struggles for air in the vast ocean of bitterness, boredom and hatred of humanity that is my mind, I'll always be at my keyboard. (Or controller, if it's a basketball game).



Yes. I am Zelum.



Oh, by the way, you can use some objects (cranes, weapons of course. Thanks to you new powers!

The building hopping Jumper and the City.



open Outcast takes some liberties with capitalisation.

A NEW CHAMPION

Is *Crysis* the game of choice for ambitious modders?MOD FOR *Crysis* WEBSITE moddb.com/games/crysis/mods

NOT LONG AGO, *Half-Life* and *Unreal* ruled the modding roost. Now it seems their days, while not coming to an end, are involving earlier bed times.

The cause of this seismic shift in the mod scene is *Crysis* and the myriad interesting mods now appearing for it; like the *MechWarrior* total conversion *Living Legends* (mechlivinglegends.net, issue 218).

There are numerous reasons for this new-found interest in Crytek's game and its engine. First of all is that more people can actually run the damn thing. *Crysis* is no longer the game that's used by people the world over to measure the quality of their rig. The CryEngine still requires a monster to get the absolute best out of it, but the majority of serious gamers will be able to get it running well now.

Secondly, the quality of the visuals that the CryEngine can deliver are giving modders, tired with the relatively drab feel of *Half-Life 2*'s Source engine and the Unreal Engine 3, a reason to experiment, in the certainty that they'll be getting a visually pleasing product that will catch the eye of browsers on sites like ModDB.

Think about it: you see a gorgeous *Crysis* screenshot and a old *Half-Life 2* image of the same scene, you're going to gravitate towards the pretty one. And finally, times will always change and people will move on to bigger, if not necessarily better, things. Two examples of this shift are *Jumper and the City* (moddb.com/mods/jumper-and-the-city) and *open Outcast* (moddb.com/mods/open-outcast), both of which show off the power of the CryEngine and its versatility, things previously hidden.

A quick glance at the list of mods out now, and those still to come, reveals a mouth-watering number of potential greats, especially *The Crysis of Cthulhu* (moddb.com/mods/the-crysis-of-cthulhu). The chance to see a game based on HP Lovecraft's works in the CryEngine is (suitably enough) mind blowing.

So things on the modding scene could be about to change. However, it's important to stress that *Half-Life 2* and *Unreal* mods will continue to dominate, simply because everyone is already at ease with them. (The Unreal Engine being available for free isn't going to hurt its popularity either.) But perhaps the CryEngine's ascension is a sign of a chink in their hitherto impregnable armour.

We'll be keeping a watchful eye on the *Crysis* modding scene and let you know how it continues to develop.

David Brown
Staff writerPCZONE
FREE-O-METER

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month

722
HOURS*

SNIPPETS



DEAD AGAIN

snipurl.com/deadcity2

Got a good memory? Then you'll recall us discussing a *Left 4 Dead* campaign called *Dead City*, many moons ago. Now it's been redone, tweaked and made available for *L4D2*, so obtain it from the link above now!



PROJECT ORIGINS

social.bioware.com/page/da-patches

Prep yourself for the *Awakenings* expansion by getting the latest patch for *Dragon Age*, which removes your ability to 'shatter' elite foes. Handily, it's on this month's DVD.



PLASTER CASTER

elecom.com/caster3d

Some people didn't like the original *Caster* game (like us). But if you did like the first episode, you'll be pleased to know all subsequent ones will be free. Kind-of-hurrah, we suppose.



Feel the tension.

BRUSH STROKES

This is the dawning of the *Age of Curling*...

WEBSITE games.blackish.at/ageofcurling

THERE ARE FEW sports that can be accurately simulated on the PC. Cricket, that's right out.

Rugby can never be portrayed effectively on a computer, let alone things like darts. Football, that works, as does tennis.

Yet nobody has ever decided to accurately simulate the world of curling. Until now that is.

Blackish Games have come out with the concept to end all concepts, a curling game in which you can manually brush the ice (yes!), assign spin or 'curl' (oh hell

yeah!), and even play against actual live human opponents (kill me, the excitement is just too great!).

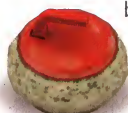
There's a trial version of the game, but you could also spend the piffling sum of \$10 to acquire the full version, which gives you access to five unique venues and three distinct play modes (by distinct we in fact mean "the same, just against the computer or not".)

The game works like this: click and drag an arrow to see where your stone will go to when released. Aim for the big

coloured circles and get as close to the middle as you can.

If the dastardly AI – or Team Blue as it prefers to be known – manages to get some of its own stones in the way of yours, either smash them out of the way (while avoiding knocking yours out of the circles) or assign curl to your stones to avoid them.

The possibilities are endless and you'll have passers-by crowding around you, eager to muscle you off the mouse and get playing themselves.



METAL HAMMER

Freshen up your *Mount&Blade* experience

WEBSITE mbrepositary.com

BLADES AND MOUNTS have been a part of PC gaming history for decades, but only Turkish studio TaleWorlds ever saw fit to jam both together to form one game. They've also got a very healthy attitude to their fans, letting them tinker with the beating ticker of their magnum opus, right down to the scary levels of doing stuff even the developers didn't know was possible, like a *Warhammer* mod.

Warsword is being made by an enterprising bunch who're aiming to recreate the world of *Warhammer* in *Mount&Blade*, with the customary insane level of detail you'd expect from a project like this. There's a guy who

specifically spends his entire time on the project modelling helmets. That's dedication to a cause, we think.

At the moment the devs are looking for more helpers, so the mod is in beta and available at the mbrepositary.com should you wish to try it out. At the time of writing it includes six races – skaven, orcs, creatures of Chaos, the humans of the Empire, and dark and wood elves – although more are promised.

Personally, we're putting all our time into the skaven, as we've fond memories of killing the whiskery bastards while playing *Advanced Hero Quest*.

Elf? Human? Chaos?
No, not Chaos.



DOES NOT COMPUTE...

Step into the shoes of a Combine grunt in *Human Error*

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/half-life-2-short-stories

ASKING THE QUESTION of what it would be like to be a Combine soldier, one curiously called Anders in a little Scandinavian twist, *Human Error* pits you against the remnants of the Xenian army, which is in disarray following the death of the Nihilanth way back in the original *Half-Life*.

If you understood all that, you're fully prepared to embark on your journey. If you didn't, you'd better bone up on your *Half-Life 2* knowledge before installing this mod. It'll be worth it in the long run.

Anders is a member of the Civil Protection unit, an arm of the Overwatch that crushes the hopes of humanity in places like City 17. Your job is to stop the enslaved Xenians fleeing the Earth, and their masters in the Overwatch, using an array of new abilities and machinery, like controllable manhacks and an APC.

There's a surprisingly cool bit in *Human Error* when you see Anders preparing for duty, putting on a Combine hockey mask, but in general you've got your usual *Half-Life* gameplay, although to describe the mod like that is doing it



The calm before the storm.

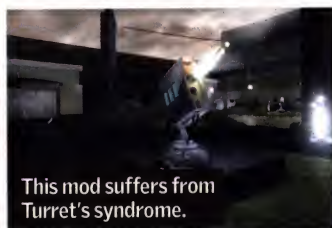
"Accept that you really should have a look at *Human Error*"

an serious injustice. There's a lot more to *Human Error* than simply some new levels, especially with the availability of some romp-tastic vehicles and new weird creatures to shoot. You can even look at

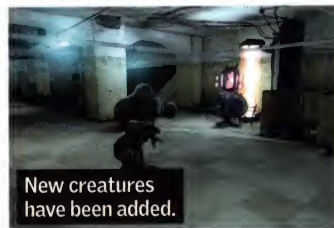
one of your Combine colleagues brushing his teeth.

Controlling the manhacks is the best bit though. A nifty little gadget allows you to pilot the whirligigs of death, which is something we're sure you've wanted to do for years now.

Doing things with the Source engine isn't new, but giving people more than the usual *Half-Life 2* mannerisms needs to be praised. So accept that you really should have a look at *Human Error*, and, perhaps, its cousin, *Paradigm Decay*, when it surfaces.



This mod suffers from Turret's syndrome.



New creatures have been added.

ETERNAL DAMNATION

It might not be *Forever*, but it is *Eternity*

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/duke-nukem-eternity



If you get this working, well done!

USING THIS MOD gets a little complicated, and we aren't entirely sure we understand what's going on. Here's what we know: *Duke Nukem Eternity* is, according to ModDB, a "Polymer-only Episode for *EDuke32* with *Dukeplus*."

Basically, it's the first episode of a mod for a mod for a Source engine port. *EDuke32* is the port – an attempt to take *Duke Nukem 3D* out of DOS and into Windows, Linux and OSX too. *DukePlus* is

a "game-enhancer and customiser" mod for *EDuke32*.

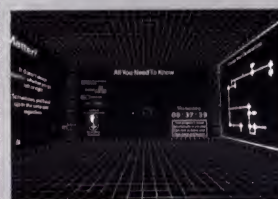
Once you've digested that, perhaps you might start worrying about how you're going to get it all working. According to the documentation provided, you'll need all the stuff mentioned above and also the *Duke Nukem High Resolution Pack Dukeplus 2.07* or higher. Did we mention that before? Crikey, it's just getting too complicated round here.

SNIPPETS



ONE-BUTTON STRATEGY

snipurl.com/paxbritannica
Keyboard-sharing is all the rage at PC ZONE, so we adore games that let four play on one keyboard. Playing *Pax Britannica* only requires one button, so get your index finger warmed up.



HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

demruth.com/hazard.htm
Hazard: The Journey of Life – a standalone *UT3* mod – is said to have puzzles that 'bend your mind'. It's been winning prizes and plaudits, so give the standalone demo a try.

Bug Fix of the Month



THIS MONTH
BORDERLANDS
UPDATE 1.30

"Opening the bank in the *Mad Moxxi* DLC no longer prevents other players moving"

Demos



Jon 'Log' Blyth is this month's DVD tour guide...

SUPREME COMMANDER 2

Big robots, relatively tiny men, great demo

WEBSITE supremecommander2.com



LET'S FACE FACTS: *Supreme Commander 2* is a multiplayer game. The single-player campaign struggles to make sense, and it's a stifling experience if you want to throw those overpowered nukes everywhere. However, it does make sense as a demo – with a lot of the best weapons locked, it's a great way of preventing you from enjoying some of the game's arcane arsenal.

However, the thing you'll enjoy most about this demo are the abysmal cutscenes. Remember the opening to *Section 8*? Where the hard-nut fighter man thinks about birthday cakes and puppy cuddles? Well, this sappy bastard phones his wife to tell her he misses her.

Get a grip, you ridiculous developer tarts – there's a time and a place for human emotion, and it's in *Final Fantasy*. We came here to rip shit up.



PROBLEM ZONE

Trouble with your DVD? Help is at hand!

1. If the menu doesn't appear when the disc spins up, open the Run command from the Start menu and enter D:\pcz.exe (D is the DVD drive's letter).
2. If you have a problem with a specific demo or application, check the DVD's Help section. Also ensure your PC's drivers and DirectX version are up-to-date.
3. If that doesn't work check our forums at pczone.co.uk for fixes, or send an email to us at letters@pczone.com. Please describe the problem, what you were doing when it occurred, any error messages that came up, and your system's details.
4. If the DVD itself is faulty, send it and an SAE to Disc Department, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW, to get a new one.

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BIG FOREHEAD

It's impossible to empathise with someone with that forehead and eyebrow ensemble. Luckily, this is a game about robots, so there'll be no soppy shit.



SOPPY SHIT

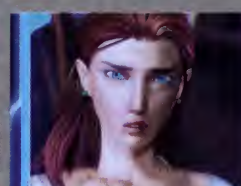
One hit from a stray plane and you're hallucinating about your children? Grow a pair, soldier, otherwise this whole game will be a blurry kid telling you he loves you.

NOW THAT'S A BAD CUTSCENE



ALRIGHTY THEN

Cut to something else entirely. No interaction, no relevance. Come on, Gas Powered Game, you could at least make this weak shit funny! You know, like C&C used to.



WHINY SOLDIER

"Get me a channel," says Bigface. "I want to tell my wife I love her. I get so emotional after these training missions. Will someone please kiss my enormous brow?"

FLOTILLA

I'd give it 10 minutes if I were you

WEBSITE blendogames.com/flotilla

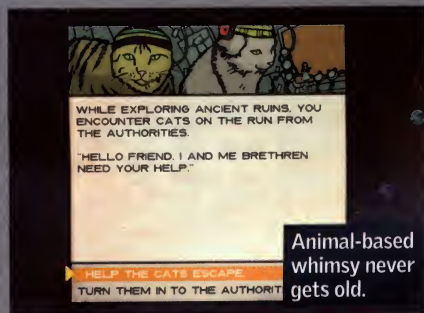
THIS IS A 3-D 'simultaneous' strategy game. I've just invented that word. It means "turn-based, but both players turns are executed at the same time."

So, as you manoeuvre your ships to fire on the weakest parts of your

enemy's craft, don't be surprised if they're not where you thought they were.

With its retro-simple design and beautifully daft log entries, *Flotilla* takes its wire-frame gameplay seriously, while still managing to squeeze in spaceships manned by felines, hicken space pirates, toucan stowaways and cursed tattoos getting burned onto your chest while you sleep.

All of this stuff has no effect on the game itself, but it definitely makes you want to gaymarry the developers.



CAPTAIN'S LOG



AURORA

"I encountered a celestial aurora. I chose to stare straight into it."



PLAY THAT GAME

"I found toucan stowaways. I decided to let them stay. They guard my Guinness."

HAMMERFIGHT

Stop! Time for an MC Hammer joke

WEBSITE koshutin.com

CONTROLS DON'T GET much more simple than swinging your mouse, and things to swing don't get much more than hammers. So swinging hammers around with your mouse should be simple and satisfying.

But *Hammerfight* is the most mouse-crushing frustrating game

we've played. It's hugely satisfying when you score a solid, full-pelt thwack on your enemy – but make one mistake in the single-player mode and there's not much hope of recovery.

Still, you can just plug four USB mice into your computer for melee. If you've got a desk the size of a beach.



1. SWORD

You'll first use the sword to attack bees. It's amazing how quickly you can die.

2. HAMMER

Hammers have a fixed distance, hit harder, but are more difficult to spin.

3. MORNING STAR

You start off with the metal ball on the end of a chain. Some good thuds to be had here.

CH-CH-CHOICES



EASY

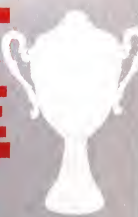
After the first level you get a branch, allowing you to choose the difficulty. Easy gives you a battle against another ship.



HARD

Hard pits you against a bunch of mindless, relentless wyrms. You will learn to hate these wyrms.

BEST OF THE REST



We've turned into the C&C Music Factory this month – only instead of music, it's demos.



RED ALERT

commandandconquer.com/classic
Who hasn't got something to say about C&C's action-packed parallel franchise? Certainly we've got minty bagfuls to spew off about it! Just not now.



TIBERIAN DAWN

commandandconquer.com/classic
The GDI missions and the NOD missions are on opposite sides of the disc. It had to be that way. They hate each other.



FEAR: SINGLEPLAYER

whatisfear.com
Sick of all the strategy? Well, here's a two-generation old shooter with that feisty wee nipper in her pre-sexual assault years.



DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS - AWAKENING

dragonage.bioware.com/awakening
If you weren't satisfied with words about this *Dragon Age* DLC, look at these moving pictures instead.

HOT DOWNLOADS
PCZONE

JUST CAUSE 2

justcause.com
Just how far can you parachute along an island? *Just Cause 2* answers that: all the bloody way along, for as long as you want. It's also a game that asks the question: where will they put strippers next?



CLOVER: A CURIOUS TALE

snipurl.com/cloverdemo
A 2D platformer that models its puzzles on the *Dizzy* series? That has to be worth checking out, especially with the charming modern graphics, and the relaxing lack of lives, energy bars, or continues.



Freeware

Adam Glick never spends if he doesn't have to



This month's free gaming fun includes a romance over the original internet; challenging hedgerows leading to gags about trimming bushes; messing around with physics-enabled letters; nuclear-powered steampunk dogfighting; and helping a famous sheep and his pals get home.

GLICK'S PICK



EXTREME GARDENING

DEVELOPER Jan Willem Nijman
WEBSITE slordig.thepoppenkast.com

HOW CAN YOU ignore a game that has the name *Extreme Gardening*? You're right, it's impossible. Just as one cannot ignore the brilliance of *Advanced Lawnmower Simulator*, a virtual hedge clipping game holds an attraction that is difficult to fathom. Thankfully, this isn't taken seriously, unlike stuff like *Crane Simulator*. It's just all about snipping leaves off a bush to make it into a shape.

That's all there is to it, with more than 10 levels of leaf-related fun to cut your way through. The shapes you're asked to create are never outrageously difficult, but even just snipping them down to a passable imitation can be very challenging.

There are four grades of quality: fail, bronze, silver and gold. We never once got a gold, managing only a handful of silvers on the way to completing the game.

The challenge is there if you want to spend a long time perfecting your digital gardening skills, and even if you don't, you can still get a laugh in the office by saying you spent the whole of last night playing a game about topiary.



DIGITAL: A LOVE STORY

Brdlbrdlbrdle shveeeee BADONG BADONG...

DEVELOPER Christine Love WEBSITE scoutshonour.com/digital

RELATIONSHIPS REQUIRE PATIENCE, a telephone line, a 3200 baud modem, numbers of several BBS sites, dialling software, and later on some codes to allow free long-distance calls.

In *Digital: A Love Story* you've been given a computer from the '80s (or you're living in the '80s, whatever's more likely) and just enough tools to access the information superhighway of the day: a crude, inefficient and backwards form of communication known as BBS.

To a large extent, this is as much a game about nostalgia as it is about love. The low-resolution, scanline-straddled desktop, the primordial windows and chunky, pixelated screen-seven fonts, and the soothing chip music streaming from your anachronistic music player are all designed to wrench you back to a time before 32-bit colour and

megabytes, probably even a time before you were born.

You start with a single local BBS number, which at first offers a list of publicly posted messages. You can hit the reply button next to any of these, which triggers an unseen, automatic response from the protagonist – you

girl to get her tits out over webcam – besides, webcams haven't even been invented yet, so the best she could do would be a crude ASCII representation, and you can hardly knock one out over that) *Digital: A Love Story* begins to feel more like a failure-averse point-and-click adventure.

"This is as much a game about nostalgia as it is about love"

might be arguing the merits of Shatner over Stewart, enquiring as to the availability of other BBS numbers, or even, once you begin to follow the plot's main thread, romancing an emotionally crooked poetess.

The joy is in the unfolding plot, and with little to actually get wrong (with no control over how you reply, there's little chance of getting pissed and asking this

Hammer the reply button along enough BBS messages, repeatedly type a string of numbers into the modem dialler, amass enough long-distance call card codes by returning to the shady bloke from the hackers' BBS, and eventually you'll come out the other end of this wonderful little pre-Pentium love tale. A linear, but defiantly enthralling indie title.

STEAMBIRDS

Take turns taking to the skies

DEVELOPER Andy Moore, Dan Cook WEBSITE snipurl.com/steambirds

NOW THIS IS more like it. A top-down dogfighting game with a turn-based tactical bent, *SteamBirds* takes you from the earliest days of flight combat right up until the fictional end of World War II in 1950.

The premise is simple – destroy your opponents before they destroy your squadron, with stars awarded for the skill shown in victory. Scrape a win with one of your wings hanging off and your flight crew spilling blood all over the cockpit and you'll only get one star, while avoiding all damage gives you the maximum of four.



Getting four stars is near impossible.

Your planes always travel along a path that you lay out for your plans, during the planning phase. What you'll always be aiming for is to get your plane behind the tail of the opposition, allowing you to nail him with gunfire until he dies. What you don't want is that to happen to you. To help you, there are a couple of recharging special moves you can utilise at key moments, such as a speed boost or the ability to turn on the spot.

This game is very difficult, certainly if you want to score the maximum four



stars on each level. There are 16 missions in all and even by the fifth one, you'll be having a lot of trouble getting a full award of stars. Simple it might be, but it also has depth in spades.

If you're an obsessive, *SteamBirds* will have you tearing your hair out in frustration as you try to avoid getting

your paintwork scratched by the flocks of enemy aircraft.

This is an excellent game and one that you could easily return to time and time again. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have an appointment with some squadrons of dastardly Jerries. And don't forget the bonus levels too!

PROSE AND MOTION

Physics and spelling together at last

DEVELOPER Deeper Beige WEBSITE snipurl.com/proseandmotion

A MASTERY OF words can open doors to the most sophisticated parts of this world, so any game that lets you practice manipulating them without boring you to death is a winner in our book.

This lexicographical light charges you with making a word out of the letters placed in front of you in order to progress to the next conundrum.

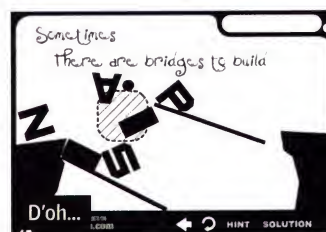
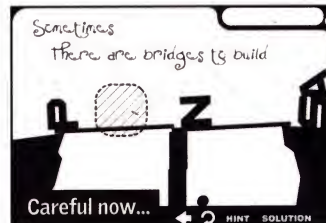
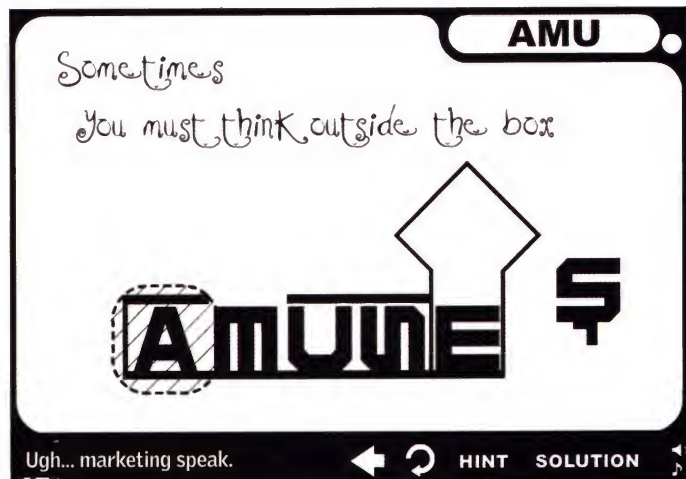
The game's also a physics-based puzzler as well, with a slightly awkward pick up-and-place mechanism for

moving letters about. It's fiddly in that when you pick up a letter, gravity will act on it, making it twist around into an annoying position. Lots of tiny taps and touches are often required to get those letters in the right place – especially on the later levels when it's not as simple as placing them all on a single flat surface.

There are many ways through each level, but only one perfect way. Text on screen gives you a clue as to what word might be the correct one, although any

anagram will allow you to progress. Some letters can be flipped to make new words – like E, which can become an M or a W depending on how it flips. This adds an extra level of challenge to discovering the perfect word and there are a lot of levels to progress through before you hit the end.

This game is for those who spend time on trains filling in crossword puzzles. But if your knowledge of the dictionary extends to looking up 'cock', 'tit' and 'bum' you're out of luck.



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



HOME SHEEP HOME

DEVELOPER Aardman Studios WEBSITE snipurl.com/homesheephhome

THIS CHARMING LEMMINGS-a-like has you guiding Wallace and Gromitt's ovine friend Shaun and his mates across 15 hazard-strewn levels, so they can get back home and indulge in a bit of lunch. You control the merry flock of sheep using the arrow keys, using physics objects to create new paths to the escape point, and your allies as platforms to leap off should you so wish.

Each sheep is of a different size, which comes into play during some of the later levels. Shaun's the useful one, because he combines the best of all worlds: speed, agility and strength. It's simple stuff, but we can't resist anything as cute as Aardman's sheep.

Extend



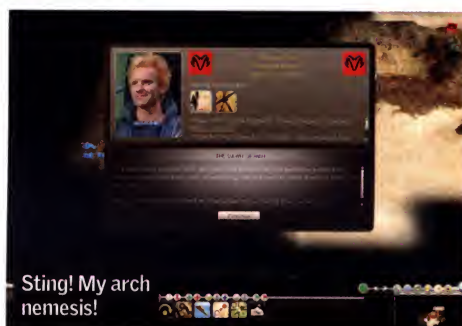
David Brown delivers some choice mods and maps



DUNE WARS

Find 'grass_texture.bmp', replace with 'sand_texture.bmp'

MOD FOR *Civilisation IV: Beyond the Sword* [WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/dune-wars](http://www.moddb.com/mods/dune-wars)



WHILE WE DO like *Civ* mods that deal with historical Mediterranean settings, they can all blend into one after a while. Once you've clapped eyes on one perennially popular scenario, you've clapped eyes on 'em all. So it's great that some mod teams are going further, choosing to stand out from the Peloponnesian crowd. We've discussed a few in these pages, but we've never been as impressed or intrigued as we are by *Dune Wars*.

There's some text missing to do with new technologies, which would make it easier for newcomers to know what was going on. But we guess the point of this mod isn't to educate those who are unaware of Frank Herbert's highly detailed *Dune* universe. Instead, it's taken for granted that you know about

the Harkonnen, the Fremen, Arrakis, melange and Kyle MacLachlan. If you don't, suffice it to say you're on a desert world and you have to do what you must to survive.

As this is a *Civ* mod, the mechanics, however different the names are, are

"It's taken for granted that you know about Harkonnen, Arrakis, melange and Kyle MacLachlan"

the same as you'll have become used to over the years: build Settlers and form new cities, locate and harvest resources, trade with neighbours, get angry with them for trying to bully you all the time, and that sort of thing. This is *Civ* as you've always known it, just

with loads of strange words and names floating about the place.

Once you're in you'll be given the chance to choose from one of the factions present in the *Dune* universe, such as the different Houses, like the Harkonnen and Atreides, and other,

stranger parties like the technology obsessed Ixians.

Accompanying all these are pictures from the films and other entries in the *Dune* franchise (and a few that aren't), which gives you an idea of the nature of the factions. For instance, Harkonnens

are ruthless and violent, so there's no point going down the pacifist route with them, as others will have bonuses to help them beat you.

When you're on the map, you'll be trying to exploit the sands and rugged terrain, avoiding sandworms, stopping smugglers raiding your territory, and figuring out how and where to expand. The icons might have changed, but the concepts are the same: water replaces wheat as the currency of growth, etc.

Dune Wars is a little fiddly to get going, giving us at least one error message on its first load, but after that it's stable enough.

Dune fans will absolutely love this mod, as will non-enthusiasts too. It's not necessarily the most innovative, but it's pretty much rock solid and a great blast for *Civ* fans.

VIETNAM MOD

Don't wait for *Call of Duty 7*

MOD FOR *Call of Duty: World at War* WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/vietnam-mod

THAT A GAME partially based in the Pacific, like *World at War*, would spawn a number of mods based on the little scrap that took place in Vietnam is logical.

This one is probably the best of the lot, but you'll have a job finding anyone playing it. This appears to be one of those good mods that no-one seems to be taking any interest in.

Conceptually, it's all good – a relatively popular game modded into a very popular setting, with all the good stuff the original game brings

with it. Yes, you've got to deal with the frustrating *PunkBuster*, which kicked us off the server five times for no reason, but other than that, the maps are large and interesting. There's even a nod to the older maps from *Modern Warfare*, with some re-imagined homages being packed into *Vietnam*.

If there are people playing, this mod would be as decent as a regular *COD* multiplayer game, with the added mosquito bites of a new and exciting setting. That's if you can find players, of course.



DARTHMOD ULTIMATE COMMANDER

Bigger, badder, and better uniforms

MOD FOR *Empire: Total War* WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/darthmod-empire

THIS MOD ALLOWS you to play with a far higher number of units on screen at any one time. The normal unit size setting in this is akin to ultra in the vanilla game, so you can expect to see upwards of 200 to 300 men per unit. If your computer can handle it, you can expect to see some truly epic bloodbaths on the *Empire* battlefields. Crivens, as they might say somewhere in the world.

Some other changes include improved land, naval and campaign

AIs, new campaign starting positions, and cosmetic changes like corrected uniforms (according to the mod's developer), new drum and fife music, and a huge number of smaller mods.

Ultimate Commander is a little fiddly to install and isn't the most stable of releases, but then the *Total War* series has never been modder-friendly. At least this uses an executable to install it, and has a large number of options.

Suffice it to say, this whopper is one *Empire* obsessives should get.

FREEZER BURN

Take a trip to Canuteland

MOD FOR *Left 4 Dead 2* WEBSITE snipurl.com/freezerburn

SO MODDERS HAVE moved onto things white, fluffy and soft, as far away from the honky tonk and bluegrass cocktail of the *Left 4 Dead 2* campaigns as can be, taking the team on a slight detour to a facility that reminds us of John Carpenter's remake of *The Thing*. It's snow, of course. The cold stuff. Ol' freezy pops.

While Kurt Russell is nowhere to be seen, lots of Infected – including a new variety of 'white' tanks – have inhabited a rather cooler location than New Orleans – a frozen skyscraper in Winnipeg, Canada. Presumably there was a convention on

or something, otherwise how do you explain so many zombies being there? Well, enough reasoning, down to the killing. This is a fairly average campaign, though it has a couple of neat extras you don't see every day – one of which is spoken dialogue created by the dev team, with responses from the *Survivors* ripped from *L4D2*'s sound archive.

While all that adds a nice little touch to the proceedings, there are a few bugs to contend with in terms of the general design. The lift in particular – both coming and going, as the campaign is designed à la *Hard Rain* – is very unstable, with the ceiling missing and Coach spawning miles away, and then mysteriously materialising back inside for no reason. It's a weird footnote to a decent, solid and snowbound campaign.

Freezer Burn's ending is tough too, and the devs could make the big red circles denying entry to the chopper a bit less obvious.



MOD CONS!

The add-ons to avoid



TUBI HATRED

MOD FOR *Max Payne 2*
WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/tubi-hater

While the idea of killing Teletubbies is appealing, you might come away from *Max Payne 2* angered, and perhaps tearful, that this atrocity has stained your hard drive and corrupted your installation files with its presence. Don't bother with it.



Morrigan will do anything, to anything.

DRAGON AGE TOOLSET

Nick Brakespear bends over his tools, flaunting bum-cleavage and tutting

MOD FOR *Dragon Age: Origins* **WEBSITE** social.bioware.com/page/da-toolset

TWO THINGS BECOME evident when delving into the arcane realms of toolsets and SDKs. Firstly, that with the vaguest of instructions and the most eccentric of software, fans can produce the most ingenious things. Secondly, these same modders will inevitably use this great talent to unleash the awesome power of breasts.

"Cast aside any notions you might have of recreating *Baldur's Gate*"

Perhaps Claudia Black's sexy deadpan has stirred the hearts and loins of *Dragon Age* players to such an extent that her virtual side-boobs are all anyone can think about. Whatever the

case, the honest search for mods that are in no way related to boobs, tits, cleavage, girl-on-girl or human-on-beast action is somewhat hampered by the deluge of items classified as NSFW.

Nevertheless, there are some gems to be found amid the sweat and saliva of sexual frustration. For those of you who felt that turning into a ball of flies was rather limp, Orgolove's *Archdemon*

Shape and Other Bosses allows aspiring megalomaniac shapeshifters to transform themselves into ridiculously oversized entities, replete with special attacks. Meanwhile, for those of you

who stubbornly refused to splash out on DLC, but still longed for the ability to store all your accumulated crap, *Misha the Hoarder* by NewYears1978 adds a wonderfully obliging young lady to your camp who'll store things for you. She even comes fully voiced. And if it's adventure you seek, *Kal Sharok* from Doctorofdarkness will see you exploring a forgotten Dwarven city with a party of brand new characters (including a werewolf) in an original campaign.

As for the *Toolset* itself, cast aside any notions you might have had of recreating *Baldur's Gate* in the *Dragon Age* engine. While the potential to do



Good... doggie?

this is there, the documentation isn't yet, and the *Toolset's* powerful tools can result in major instabilities should you sneeze at the wrong moment, potentially crippling your *Dragon Age* installation if you were daft enough to try adjusting the official campaign directly. So don't try that.

But don't let these ominous words dissuade you completely. At the very least, you can make a nice new hat. **PCZ**

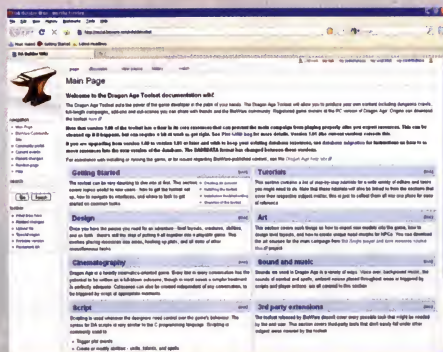
THE DIVINE ACT OF CREATION

In the beginning, there was headwear



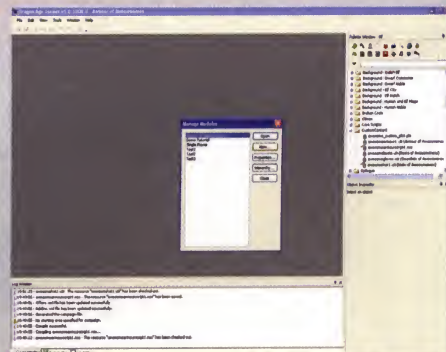
1. BE SOCIABLE

The first obstacle faced by any aspiring *Dragon Age* modder is the simple act of obtaining the *Toolset*. This requires an account on the BioWare Social Network (social.bioware.com) and the registration of your *Dragon Age: Origins* CD key. The download itself is hefty enough at 500MB and the installation is a long process full of daunting references to databases.



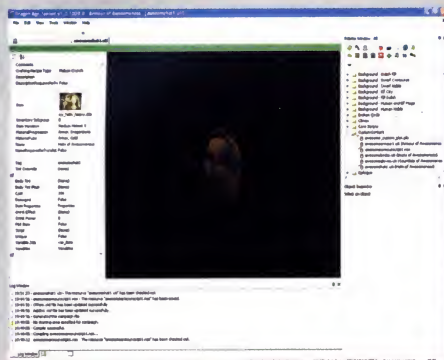
2. READ THE MANUAL

The DA Builder Wiki (social.bioware.com/wiki/datoolset) shows the basics of module making, so is a good place to start. However, the wiki is incomplete in places and often presumes prior knowledge, neglecting to inform you that using the *Toolset* is like talking to a toddler who keeps asking questions. Thankfully, there are plenty of modders on the Social Network offering guides and advice.



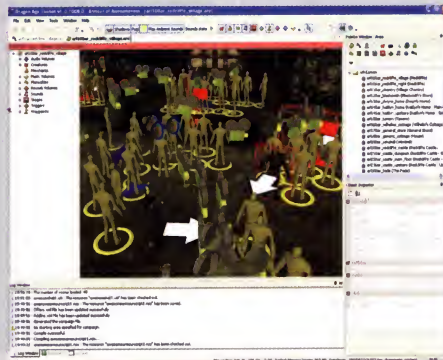
3. SHOW IT WHO'S BOSS

When creating a new module, ensure that 'Single Player' is ticked under the Hierarchy options. This tells the *Toolset* that your mod is using existing game content. And setting 'Extended Module' to 'Single Player' in module properties tells the *Toolset* that you're adding stuff to the main game, instead of making a new campaign. Forgetting to do these things can lead to headaches and eyeball explosions.



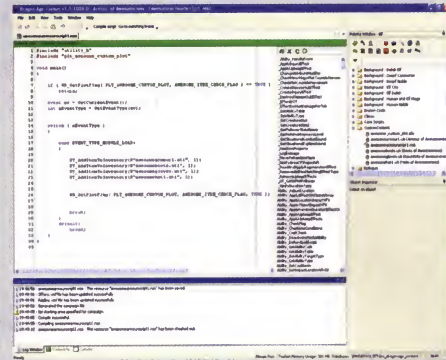
4. HANDLE YOUR ASSETS

If you're familiar with *Neverwinter Nights' Aurora* toolset, you'll have an advantage here. *Dragon Age Toolset's* icons and layout are very similar, as is the act of creating new items and assigning their properties. Indeed, the simplest part of making a new hat is making the hat. Getting it into the game may lead to bellowing a series of expletives at your monitor.



5. DEPOSIT YOUR LOOT

Unlike its predecessor, the *Toolset* doesn't allow you to simply drag-and-drop your new hat into the game world. Due to the limitations of the game's design, such items must find their way directly into the player's inventory, or be looted from creatures or containers. While the latter is theoretically possible, editing existing areas is fraught with complications, and as such the former is easier.

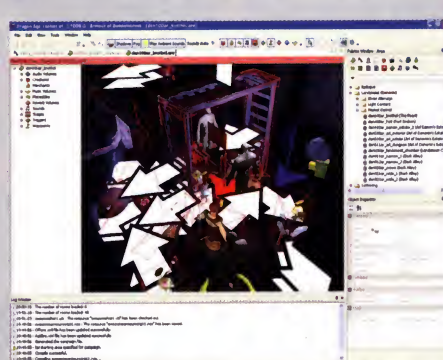


6. LEARN THE SCRIPT

Unfortunately, this is where you'll have to learn a bit of scripting. Not a huge amount, mind you, but enough to be able to use the *UT_AddItemToInventory* function to tell the game to add your new hat to your character's inventory the next time you load or start a game. Good examples of this kind of work can be found online, so you need not start from scratch.



This elf needs headwear. See? He's angry about it.



7. THE EXPORT BUSINESS

If all goes according to plan and your eyeballs remain intact, you should be ready to export your work. When exporting (which renders the mod playable), ensure that you select only the stuff you've made, and choose 'Export Without Dependent Resources', otherwise the *Toolset* will try to export everything in the game, and you'll die of old age before it finishes.



8. TICK YOUR BOX

Your mod should appear in the Downloadable Content part of *Dragon Age's* main menu with a tick box to activate it. Cross your fingers, expect something to have gone wrong, but consider each monumental cock-up you make a monument to the learning process. In the end, you'll have your new hat, and any subsequent millinery work in the *Toolset* will seem easier.

Online Zone

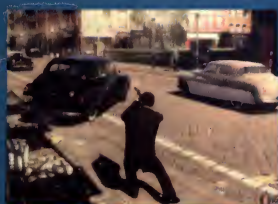
What's new in *PC ZONE*'s forum and Fight Club

Come and take on the Zone Staff in our monthly online gaming free-for-all!

Arena combat was the order of the day this month, taking centre stage over a decidedly unusual chat session, a forum creaking to breaking point with angry complaints and vociferous debate, plus a Twitter feed that has so many followers, we might just have to start naming ourselves as a religion on official census forms very soon. Keep watching the net, people.

tw@tter

Tweeting like a bird



RAGE IS ALL the rage on Twitter, with everyone throwing out their opinions on everything, be they well-informed, ignorant or just plain mental. So why not tap into this opinionated mess by asking you, the readers, some questions.

First of all, we asked whether you hated games that require constant internet connections more than paying for content you've already technically got on the game disc.

Seregrail7 was most explosive in his reaction, wondering why "They haven't figured out to put in a few 100MB of filler to make it seem like you're downloading something." Elsewhere, comments about always-online single-player games seem to indicate that basically, you all hate it intensely, but that it doesn't necessarily have to affect the score we give it in the magazine. We tend to agree with this viewpoint, as you could probably tell from Log's review of *Assassin's Creed II* (issue 219).

Elsewhere, we've had the usual constructive and intelligent discourse with the public at large, which generally involved casting our eyes skyward and wondering about *Mafia II*'s newly announced *Playboy* connection and, finally, saying "Did it just get roomier in here?"

FIGHT CLUB

Pummel us in our Arena, readers!



A LITTLE CHANGE from the norm this month, although you could argue playing *Team Fortress 2* yet again isn't indicative of that much in the way of difference. Instead of the usual gore-soaked feud that is 2fort, we went with a pick from a reader.

Clusker!?! should take a bow here for suggesting we play some Arena maps for once and so, eyes glinting with the newness of it all, we found ourselves strutting our stuff on two Arena maps – Granary and Nucleus – one of which, to the uninitiated, is a basic "two teams pile into the middle and attempt to hold an area" deal, while Nucleus was, well, we got a bit confused by it. It's set inside a building with a big thing in the middle, that's all we remember.

IN GRAINED

Granary was where the majority of the combat took place, so naturally it is to there that we turn our attention first.

Lilbitorange made a request early on in the game, which was simply that we mention him in this write-up. Ask and ye shall receive, small fruit-related person.

After that was cleared up, teams were drawn up and combat was joined. Steve made a critical error of selecting



the Sniper, which is a class that's not really suited to the close combat and rushing about required in Granary. Maybe a more capable player could have survived, but rushing the enemy with a bow and arrow is going to lead to only one place: constant death. To be fair, he took out a few players with his insane arrow-wielding and his team, perhaps because the enemy were distracted by his antics, were able to claim numerous victories.

As time wore on, Medics came to be the difference between winning and losing. If a team found they had few of the health givers in their ranks, or that the ones they did have chose their allies badly, defeat swiftly followed. To his credit, Lilbitorange didn't even need to ask to be mentioned, as his sterling Medic work at David's back provided the backbone for numerous victories, thanks to that timeless duo of Medic and Heavy proving too much for the enemy to break down.

Things had gone well and the Group Photo was a must. Usually, it's very difficult to get one set up, with players failing to read the message logs and just wading in with a flamethrower, but this time, much to the relief of the picture taker, hostilities were swiftly put aside for a few seconds and a photograph was taken. And, again as usual, it wasn't long before the photographer opened up with a minigun.

Next month, we may well try to get some *Battlefield: Bad Company 2* going on, so watch the *Steam* announcement feed for more news.

"Steve took out a few players with his insane arrow-wielding"



NOTES FROM THE FORUM

The *Human Revolution* is nearly here, but is *Deus Ex 3* floating boats?

THETINGLER: The reports that Square Enix are doing the cutscenes internally are not true, apparently – they're only doing the trailers. The in-game cutscenes are all made by Eidos Montreal using the game's engine. There are references to the Icarus, which suggests that we may see an early version of the Icarus/Daedalus/Helios AI that played such a key role in both *Deus Ex* and *Invisible War*. Eidos Montreal still have to prove themselves, but that information has assuaged the "Oh God! What the f**k do they think they're doing?" feeling I felt after reading the *PC ZONE* preview.

KING. CLUELESS: It was a roller coaster ride of emotion watching the trailer though. It's so funny to feel so protective of something in fact I wonder why it's like that with *Deus Ex*. The trailer wasn't all bad and I've still got my fingers crossed.

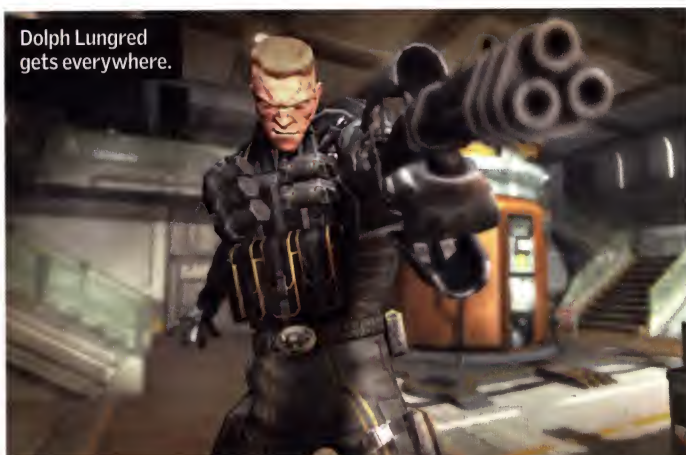
SHAKERMAKER07: The fact that it is titled 'Xbox 360 trailer' tells me that it won't be half as good as the now

hallowed original. I reckon Eidos should throw a pile of cash at Warren Spector in the hope he might scribble an overview on a napkin that they can follow at the very least. When did *Deus Ex* become all about "I'm a cyborg woe is me"? I know the Dentons were modified more than Wandy's PC, but I always thought *Deus Ex*'s strengths were in the conspiracy and paranoia woven into the universe.

KING. CLUELESS: I did enjoy the story, even if it was bollocks. With the gameplay allowing you to play numerous ways, the linear story didn't feel so structured because it was all over the place. Love *Deus Ex*. Think I'll walk out of the office and go home to play it.

LIQUID. METAL: I'm looking forward to them explaining why in 20 years time we all dress up like it's 1784 and then 20 years after that go for the *Matrix* trench coat and sunglasses look. That's some fashion crisis the world is going to be put through.

Dolph Lungred gets everywhere.



CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you find yourself unable to make it to Fight Club – perhaps you've decided to wander the plains of the Serengeti to find yourself – then join other *PCZ* readers on the following public servers.

WHO'S WHO

Steve Hogarty [PCZ]misterbrilliant
David Brown [PCZ]plughead
Phil Wand [PCZ]peoplesfrontofjudea
Jon Blyth [PCZ]log
Will Porter [PCZ]batsphinx

BATTLEFIELD 2
85.236.100.48:16567

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE
85.236.100.48:28960

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE
85.236.100.48:27015

DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE
85.236.100.48:27315

HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH
85.236.100.48:27215

TEAM FORTRESS 2
85.236.100.48:27115

SERVERS PROVIDED BY...



MULTIPLAY

ZONE CHAT

Bleak Wilderness



Symbolic, isn't it?



THIS MONTH WASN'T a popular one for chatting, as everyone who did venture into the room ended up going straight into *Fight Club* and ignoring the pleas of those left behind.

Steve attempted to get a little bit of discourse going, while we tinkered with the *Fight Club* server, but it seems not that many of you have bothered to replay *Portal* to find the new achievements and clues hidden within. Perhaps because others have done it for you already, who knows? MichaelKelleherTheName said he had been too busy playing other games to bother with an old one like *Portal*, but Marzy chirped up and said he had just played the final level to see the new ending.

Regular contributor Clusker!?! wondered aloud why David had changed his name from Plughead to Captain_Haddock, but his Tintin-related answer fell on deaf ears. After that, there was only silence as players imbibed the holy juices of *Team Fortress 2*.

A little burp of activity followed an hour later, as the players tired of the destruction and returned to the chat room.

"gg all" said Clusker!?!.

"gg" Marzy replied.

"Anyone know whether *The Passing* on L4D will be free? I haven't been on a zombie rampage in a while," Clusker!?! asked, but there was no answer. He was alone.



HOW TO JOIN IN!

To be a part of next month's *ZONE* Chat, join our Steam Community group: *PC ZONE (PCZ)*. If you don't have *Steam*, first be ashamed of yourself, and then download it from steampowered.com. Keep an eye out for announcements in that there *Steam* group for the date of the next chat event...

Retrozone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...

Flashback

AFTER DUNGEON MASTER

A FEW YEARS back *Dungeon Master* appeared in *Retro Zone*. This was a classic dungeon trawl, and the first one in 3D, with memorable moments shot through the entire game. From the first level, where you chose your party from a selection of portraits (the names Tiggy Tamal and the totally sexy Darouu are still unjustifiably fresh in my brain), to the runic spell system that worked cleverly enough to make you think you could guess spells.

This is one of the few games that made me write a childish letter to its game's developers. So Faster Than Light

got a note from me which effectively said, "I love your game here are my ideas for a new monster and here is a rune I drew, it's an ultra-powerful rune that lets you do whatever you like."

DEEPER DELVING

So when the expansion – *Chaos Strikes Back* – was announced it was one of the first cases of heart-stopping sequel excitement I'd ever known. The news that I could import my new players from *Dungeon Master*? Cop that, *Mass Effect 2* – you ain't all that. The idea that there was no longer a linear progression through the levels? Chew it, *Just Cause 2*!

But how? Going back underground

This is the part where after whipping you into a frenzy of nostalgia with our rose-tinted cat o' nine tails, we tell you in the most roundabout way possible to download the game off some semi-illegal websites. But not this time. No this time, we're going to point you that online junk seller eBay, for a quick search of the words

"dungeon master PC" will take you to numerous people who are selling their old copies of this game at outrageous prices. It's a freakin' video game – not a genuine antique you borderline con merchants.

ebay.co.uk
Purveyor of all things secondhand.



The problem? Well, that was it. Going up and down levels didn't make you feel like you were exploring a complicated dungeon, it just thieved any sense of progress and made you feel hopelessly lost. And the difficulty of the new monsters (some of which were copied from the main game) was a symptom of the era when developers thought, "Well, the first game was obviously easy enough to complete. We won't make that mistake again."

So it wasn't until *Dungeon Master II: The Legend of Skullkeep* came out that everyone realised *Chaos Rising* was a joke. This was the sequel, after all! You could pick up tables, move them around, and go outside. Outside! And there were even shops, and a currency system



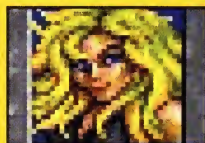
involving coins and gems. The one problem? Well, it came out nearly a decade after the first game, and didn't add much to the original's formula.

Looks like someone forgot that making the first 3D dungeon crawler ever doesn't give you the lifelong right to keep on making the same game. And that's still true, no matter how much money EA Sports makes.

The Stars of Skullkeep The heroes of *Dungeon Master II*



1 TORHAM ZED
Unlike the first game, you don't get a choice about the first guy. You're lumped with TZ.



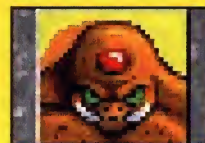
2 HET FARVIL
Skullkeep's very own Bonnie Tyler, with a name right out of the syllable generator machine.



3 EQUUS
This chap is named after the Tim Schafer play in which Harry Potter stabs a horse. I think.



4 BANE BLADE CLEAVER
Reckon he sounds tough? His real name is Pips McGhee, and he's nine.



5 CLETUS
A ruby in his forehead and named after a redneck: he's a front-line brawler with the most hit points.



6 GRAEN OZBOR
The dwarf with the glowing eyes has the most mana. But keep him in the back row.

Now & Then

FEAR 3 vs CRAZY BALLOON

FEAR.



THE TWO MIGHT not look similar at first sight, but the systematic abuse and revenge of Alma, has more than a passing resemblance to Taito's 1980 arcade balloon-popper.

The titular balloon was out of your control, swinging wildly and suicidally out of your jurisdiction. The balloon was crazy – just like Alma. Then there are the shock twists. After a change of scenery in level three, it's back to levels one and two – but this time, the whole levels move around. It's like Taito are walking in your head and telling you that everything you know is meaningless. Just like Alma. Then there's the discordant *Banjo On My Knee* that kicks off the game – a nightmarish monophonic beep-version that lets you know that death is casual, and nothing will ever end happily. Just like Alma does.

Also, if you get to level 20 a dead woman straps you to a machine and sits on your cock.



Play it! How to feel the terror of a runaway balloon

- 1** Crazy Balloon is an old arcade game, so you'll need to install MAME to play it. It's illegal, but so is drink driving, and that's just about the coolest thing you can do.
- 2** When downloading MAME, it's best to get a version with a UI. Some people might get their cheapies working on the command line, but they're not actually human.
- 3** We recommend that you Bing MAMEUI32. Haha! We just used the word 'Bing' as a verb. No-one does that. Google it. Just use Google like everyone else. Bing, indeed.
- 4** Now set off a 19GB every-arcade-game-ever torrents, and you'll be liable for millions of pounds worth of punitive damages and an indefinite stay in Guantanamo Bay!

MAMEframe

FRISKY TOM

HOPES WERE HIGH, when I saw the title: *Frisky Tom*. It can only be a game in which a howling cat marks his territory and attempts to woo a similar cat with a bow in its hair.

The end of every level would, I imagined, feature the two retiring to a cat box, and love hearts appearing before the deafening screeches cause the owner to throw the lady cat out, triggering level two.

Instead, *Frisky Tom* seems to be based on a very Japanese semi-understanding of English. There are mice involved, so you'd kind of expect a cat – but no, Tom is a plumber. And his friskiness appears to be limited to a pair of slightly revealing shorts, and

WHAT IS MAME?

The Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator runs over 3,500 games. You can get it from mamedev.org or from this issue's DVD (we've also got 32 and 64-bit versions of MameUI, which has a nice interface). But downloading games for it is illegal. So don't.

the fact that you're fixing a lady's shower. (Perhaps he gets to watch? It's not clear).

Unplayable, fun-free, and genuinely shocking that it got a PlayStation release two decades later.



Very early CGI porn.



Time Trump

MEDIOCRITY GONE BY

IT'S TIME FOR another look at the games that didn't make a splash back then, and probably don't need to be remembered now. History isn't just the highs and lows – the majority is a huge amount of forgettable bollocks.

So let's pay homage to the games of September 2002 that never get mentioned in retrospectives or best-of lists.

SKY SPORTS FOOTBALL QUIZ II SCORED: 50%

Steve Hill succumbs to cheapness: "For less than a tenner, you can't complain."

AGASSI TENNIS GENERATION 2002 SCORED: 40%

Steve Hill fails to get a lob on: "Either get *Virtua Tennis* or stick to watching Wimbledon."

MYTHICAL WARRIORS SCORED: 18%

Chris Anderson puts the boot on: "Unrewarding gameplay and lacklustre presentation ensure that this game will be taking its rightful place in the bin as soon as this game is finished."

INDUSTRY GIANT II SCORED: 71%

Andrew Wright has his low expectations confounded: "While not a giant in its field, it's not the giant bore it threatened to be, either."

ZANARRAH: THE HIDDEN PORTAL SCORED: 79%

Keith Pullin damns with faint praise: "A surprisingly playable blend of third-person RPG and no-nonsense FPS."



Back In The Day

PHANTASMAGORIA

Jon 'Log' Blyth opens a box and releases evil. He never listened to Pandora

DEVELOPER Sierra On-Line PUBLISHER Sierra Online RELEASED 1995

DARLING, I HAD that dream again. "What dream was that, honey?" You know, snookums. That dream where there's a sultan's head on a snake and a man looking upset in a chair. "That chilling dream, full of portent?" That's the one, darling. Do you think it has anything to do with the very essence of evil? "Well, the symptoms match, but I wouldn't rule out the possibility that you're a mad bitch, either." Thanks. Now let's sex until the game starts. "Uh uh uuh." Ooooh.

So begins *Phantasmagoria* – or so it'd begin if I wrote the script. It's a true testament to modern video compression that *Phantasmagoria*'s tiny, interlaced video window and twee blue-screening of the characters onto still backgrounds, that this game takes up 1.6GB. That's 2.5 DVD rips. It's more than an hi-def movie. It's... *Phantasmagoria*.

A GAME...

In essence, this is a halfway house between point-and-click adventures and the cursed genre of the interactive movie. What this means in terms of playing the game, is you get to control a digitised real lady, by clicking one of the few points on the screen that turn your cursor red. She will then follow one of the limited animations open to her, before shuffling around for a couple of seconds, and returning to her idle static animation. It'd be a bit more convincing if she scratched her arse once in a while, but once she's guided herself into that idle position, there's nothing but a bristling of the white pixels that come from low-budget Chroma key.

Anyway, the storyline? Well, you've just moved into a house. Needless to say,



There's a Nick Cave song in there somewhere.

it's a spooky old house that used to be owned by an illusionist of questionable sanity, and behind the dining room fireplace there's a box of evil.

...OF EVIL!

The evil flies around the house, landing in your husband, which finally causes him to grow a set of balls and chew you out for being a weird, still-standing hair-flicking woman who's just knocked a massive hole in their dining room wall

for no other reason than she needs a hobby.

Of course, it's not all roses and dandelions being married to the incarnation of evil – he locks himself away in that darkroom, and ruins a perfectly nice picnic by being extremely snippy. So Adrienne takes refuge in her investigations in the nearby town of Nipawomsett (most likely named after the brown nipple and womb set that make up the gynaecological special



Computer games, sexist? Never.

Say Phantasmagoria with the what now?

From the did-you-know fact box called the internet

Phantasmagoria, apart from being the name of albums, singles, and bands the world over, is the name of a 19th century projection show. It's just the kind of thing that made ladies swoon – not because they're frail delicate creatures – more because the fashion of the day included corsets so tight you couldn't breathe wearing them.

The magician in the game, Carno, held evenings of illusion and smelling salts, but

was dissatisfied with the fact he wasn't actually magic. Think of him as a ye-olde David Blaine, if you will. Only instead of shutting himself in a box, he bought an Egyptian book and unleashed evil upon the world.

As a side note, if evil doesn't have any humans to infect, it just dissolves into ponds, where it gives off an unappealing odour that makes frogs sad.



Fortune cookies are usually fun.



"Phantasmagoria is a surprising amount of fun, even if you do have to resort to irony far too often"



edition of Monopoly). And oh, the rich tapestry of characters and puzzles you'll find there! An angry dog requires a bone, point-and-click fans – but where do you get a bone from? Well, explore the grocery store, and you'll find a barrel. And what's in the barrel? Free soup bones! How do you know they're free soup bones? There's a sign, saying 'free soup bones'!

To be completely fair on the game and its author, and to avoid being an

utterly snide prick, *Phantasmagoria* is a surprising amount of fun, even if you do have to resort to irony far too often. And the story itself would probably make a decent film, once the (perhaps deliberately) twee introduction subsides into the murders and sexual assault of the later parts of the game.

Put on your most forgiving trousers, download a walkthrough, and plod through *Phantasmagoria*. It's a little bit of tepid history. **PCZ**

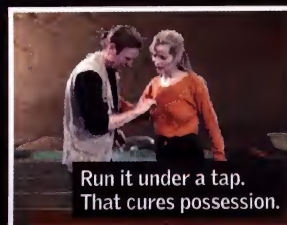
Putting the LOL into dialogue

Transcribing the conversations... of EVIL

MINE'S A PINTERESQUE

Adrienne: Er... ma'am? [beat]
Shopkeeper: Yes?
[hesitating] Hi, I'm Adrienne Delany. I just moved from Boston. I was wondering if you could tell me...
[interrupting, after a pause] Did you say your name was Adrienne Delaney. You're not a writer, are you?
[quickly] Yes I am, why do you ask?
I just loved your mystery novel *Blue Moon Rising*, I couldn't put it down for a week! Can I have an autograph?
[two second pause]
Yah! Sure! [pause]
Oh, thank you! What's your next book about?
[after a brief pause] I'm afraid you're just going to have to wait for it to come out!
[a short silence] Oh fiddle, I was afraid you'd say that. So can I help?

This agonising exchange doesn't earn you a discount on the \$2,200 dollar crucifix.



THE ESTATE AGENT

After the smarmy realty guy makes a pass at her, Adrienne's insult is confusingly timed...

Creep: Such a shame you've got a husband! What did you say your husband's name was?
AD: [aside] Asshole.

SCRIPT ECONOMY

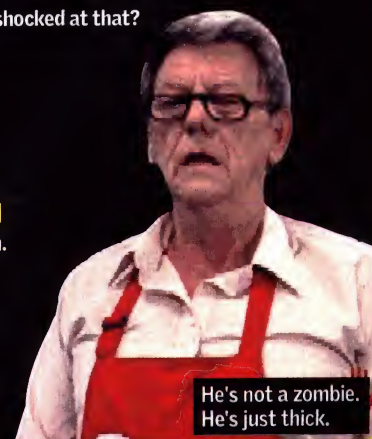
Adrienne has opened a box of evil, touched a transparent bubble of goop, and been told by other people that her house is haunted, yet she still finds it in her heart to have this conversation.

Townie: So you're the ones who moved into that house!
AD: Why does everyone look so shocked at that?
T: Don't you know?
AD: Know what?
T: That place is haunted!
AD: Haunted?

ADRIENNE AND LOU'S BACKPATting SESSION

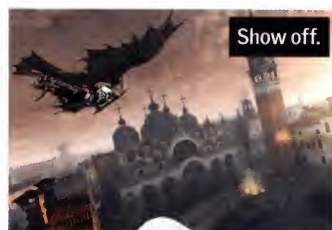
AD: I'd like to meet this Malcolm.
I have a number of questions.
Lou: No wonder you're a good writer. You have a natural inquisitiveness.

Get a room, girls!



On the PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them



ASSASSIN'S CREED II

Stabbing Da Vinci: **Steve Hogarty**

SO THE SEQUEL TO *Assassin's Creed* looks great, plays a whole bunch better than the first, and definitely has its moments. But I had one problem with it, and it wasn't even the DRM. It was the moments when the camera when completely spanner-mental on me.

During combat – especially near walls – an algorithm kicked in that made

the camera slip inside a building. And, unlike most games in this situation, it didn't make the wall transparent. It was only by mashing my mouse around like I was grooming a pony that I managed to see what was going on.

Oh, and when I push the W button, that means "go the direction the camera is pointing" not "Go the direction Ezio is facing". The amount of times I jumped into nothing, because I'd forgotten to tap WASD until Ezio was facing the right way first. This is only a problem when jumping, which isn't a mitigation as this is a game all about jumping.

And as Ubisoft fixed so much that was wrong with the first game, why didn't they fix the meaningless colour-coded icons? 360 owners got A on their

green button, why not a little space bar for us? I resent the time I spent in the options menu, copying out what the hell all the symbols meant.

And we all need something pointless to fill our time for no reward, but collecting 100 feathers? This is what it takes to stir your mum out of catatonia? Wouldn't it be a little more satisfying if she decided to start talking again because she loved you? She wasn't even looking, I could just say, "there you go, 100 feathers, all nice in the box," and she'd have said, "that's magic son, let's go sword shopping".

VERDICT: Feathery bollocks



ALIENS VS PREDATOR

Getting a rewind: **David Brown**

THE PREDATOR JUST shouldn't ever, ever be this weak. It cheapens the history of Arnold's fight against the beast to have him killed so easily by regular aliens and humans. You're supposed to be an elite one as well. It's hard to believe these goons would be feared across the galaxy if they were as feeble as this. But in that nonsensical way that videogame developers think, whenever you have to fight an AI Predator, they're tough as nails. So is your Predator a haemophiliac or something?

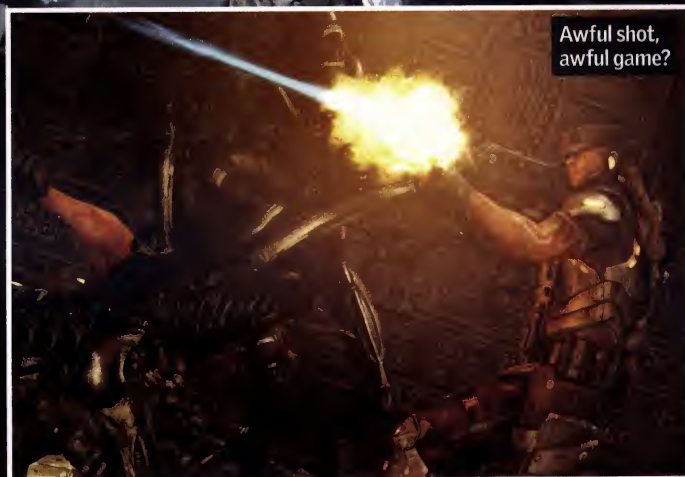
And don't get me started on the performance issues. I can take a bit of slowdown every so often, my computer's not the best in the world, but crikey o' blimey, the freezing was unbearable at times. And perplexingly

random too, not having much rhyme nor reason to it. At least there was a lot of the game to play through, three different campaigns and... no, wait a minute, they were all the same, weren't they? Just repeats of the same levels that I'd already been through, mostly. Nice one, Rebellion. Cheers for giving me value for money.

At least I could enjoy myself as a Predator by remaining cloaked and not being spotted by humans. Oh yeah, that doesn't happen either: a mere glimpse of you uncloaked means marines can home in on you for as long as they're alive, no matter how far away or how many times you've disappeared.

Thanks Rebellion. I'm fed up now. I need some Anadin.

VERDICT: Headache-y



Awful shot, awful game?

"Nice one, Rebellion. Cheers for giving me value for money"

BORDERLANDS

Crater-faced: **Adam Glick**

BWAHHHH, I SCOFFED. Bwaahh, look at the sun in *Borderlands* - it doesn't move! That's not videogame fact. That's videogame fiction. Exactly what sort of fool do Gearbox take me for? What flavour of moron do they think I am? Unmoving sun my foot!

And then you notice that the planet of Pandora isn't lit by the sun. It's lit by moonlight, illuminated by a heavenly body suspended forever in one spot. A new moon heralds the dead of night,

and a full moon equates to high-noon. And that's a rather beautiful idea - certainly an original thought.

Criticise *Borderlands* for its rat-like skags all you like, but you can't fault Gearbox on a design front. Skags fulfil the role of cannon fodder, but crucially: they're not rats. Nothing is anything familiar, everything is frightening or at the very least interesting.

Characters like Claptrap (I say that as if *Borderlands* has more than just one

interesting character) will be fondly remembered for their bold presence on an otherwise desolate rock. And the art style too - for bravely scrapping the original brown blur of a game and replacing it with this painting, Gearbox deserve a hundred million high-fives.

Until I chuck myself into the co-op I'll reserve judgement on everything about *Borderlands* that isn't a lantern moon, a small rat-like creature or a wise-cracking robot. In the meantime I'll be questioning the astrophysics involved. It's questionable, surely.

VERDICT: Moonstruck



Kill, loot, move on, repeat.



More minx than skag.

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

SACRED 2: FALLEN ANGEL

Just got it for a few quid, right bastard to patch though - makes me long for the ease and convenience of auto patchers. Anyway, game looks good.

Andy Monahan

BAD COMPANY 2

This has the best opening level I've seen in a long time, I want more of the WWII level. The modern levels are pretty good, but oh what a lovely multiplayer!

Mad AI

STARCRRAFT II

Currently downloading the beta, I'm stoked that I get to test it, I loved the beta of *StarCraft*. **Squits**



JUST CAUSE 2

David Brown tethers himself to Peter Johansson...

WRITING UP OUR talk with Peter Johansson was difficult, because we now spend every waking second parachute-climbing mountains and battering hanging enemies to death with our grappling hooks in *Just Cause 2*.

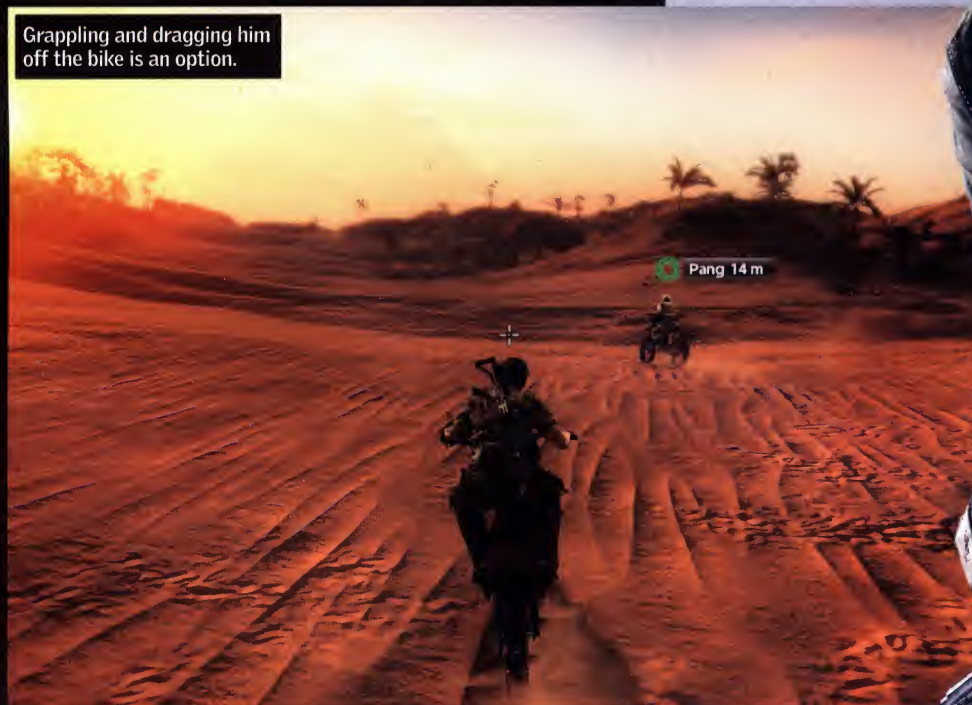
Understandably pleased with the way the game came out, he was bubbling over with enthusiasm as we slumped together in overly-plush leather seats somewhere in deepest,

trendiest London. Together we relayed our best "that was pretty cool when I..." stories from the game and also sought answers to that most hallowed of questions: why can't we tether ourselves to a dolphin and go surfing across the sea? Well, he wouldn't tell us, but there was lots he would impart. Read about what he had to say right below this sentence.



Peter Johansson
Lead Game Designer,
Avalanche Studios

Grappling and dragging him off the bike is an option.



Heavily armed man, and people don't run. Eh?



01 THINK TANK

"One of the cool things about *Just Cause 2* is it has its own flavour. It's found its own direction and I think that's something that's really needed in this genre, which is getting pretty crowded. It's centred around that sense of fun that you can have all the time. That gave us a great deal of freedom to brainstorm lots of ideas, a lot of which, in the end, we couldn't do. Like animals: having them would mean you'd have to create behaviours for them as well. The environments would have been nice with some animals in there, though. Some people don't notice it, but some do, saying "Oh, I want to explore the animal life," and some might find it relaxing, swimming and seeing there are fish about. Perhaps you could even have tethered yourself to a dolphin. If that was in the game, it would definitely be trailer material."



Narrow escape #103.

02 FRIENDLESS

"Multiplayer's something you need to do exactly right, and will spend a lot of time and resources on doing. We tossed around a few ideas but we realised we'd have to spend a lot of time doing it, meaning there would be less resources we could put towards the single-player. There were lots of things we had to improve from the first game, to get the core foundation the best we can, because otherwise we have nothing to build on for a multiplayer game anyway, because people are just going to play the game once and then just go back to playing *Call of Duty*.

"A lot of the time multiplayer is sort-of expected, so you do it and it ends up as a half-baked thing, so I think when we feel we're sure we can do it and keep that exciting core experience then we will. There's a lot of really crazy physics going on too, so we'd have to deal with that."

Carjacking, Rico style.



That chopper was only two days from retirement.

"Oh, you remembered my birthday!"



You need more than an Uzi to blow them up.

03 ABOVE THE LAW

"I think the story is important, to give you a context to your different actions, but in the end it's also not meant to be too deep or anything, because that can get in the way of the 'fun' and the playfulness of it all. A lot of the missions came from when we started brainstorming and, in the end, the ideas just kept getting crazier and crazier. I can see why people would see '80s action films in it, and we also wanted to change the Rico character, make him a bit more rugged, a bit cooler in that sense. We didn't want him to come across as a secret agent, Rico's not really a James Bond character. He goes in with a bang, causes lots of explosions, that's his way of dealing with problems, while James Bond would probably go undercover. Rico's a bit louder than that."

"Rico's not really a James Bond character"

04 FINISH HIM & CAR TUNES

"I reckon it would probably take over 100 hours to complete everything in *Just Cause 2*. I know what to do, and my highest save in terms of completion, before they changed the save system and I had to start all over again, was around 60% or something like that, and I had 60 hours or so invested in it."

"The metrics are fun as well, the system that tracks peoples' progress, completion percentage stuff to create leaderboards based on that as well. That's really addictive and we kept playing the demo around the office and competing for the highest score, most chaos, that sort of thing."

"As for the car radio? Having one came up, but we didn't want to just do it as a knee-jerk reaction. Usually you're not going long distances in the vehicles, you're using extractions or a plane or something, so we felt it wasn't really needed. We felt it wasn't really enough bang for the buck, so we concentrated on other stuff."

Real men don't use parachutes, Rico.

Close parachute SPACE

Kerb-crawling, Panau-style.



06 FILL 'ER UP

"The game world is actually the same size as *Just Cause*, as it was more important for us to fill the world with stuff rather than just making a bigger game area. That's why we went spent a lot of time thinking about the make-up of the game, completely redesigning the mission structure.

"We probably spent months thinking about and trying out different things, seeing where we wanted to go with that, to make it more suitable for this huge world. We easily could have made it bigger, but there wouldn't have been much point. You can definitely be too big a game compared to the amount of content you have. That's definitely the challenge for us as designers. We know we have good tech, we know we can do big worlds, but we decided not to make ours bigger, concentrating on how we could make better use of it instead."

05 EASTER EGGS

"There's some really cool stuff to discover. We actually made a list to give to Square Enix of all the stuff that was in there, just before delivering the final build, because we needed to be sure nobody had put anything in that we weren't aware of! But yeah, there's some fun stuff in there, like the shark, which you can find by looking at the correct area for a while. You asked for some igloos last time we spoke, but there aren't any in the game. However, there's a snowman. You can interact with him. He's near the ski resort, if you want to find him."



There's even a flying low achievement.



"Can I give you a lift, buddy?"



<Insert Beach Boys joke here>



"Hmm... don't fancy it now..."



07 THRILL RIDE

"I did something with a gas station during a mission, which has a big chase at the end that actually takes you, depending on which route you take, towards this station.

"So what I did was, and I had a rocket launcher as well, I drove past the station to the other side, jumped up on the roof of my vehicle and fired a rocket into the gas station, which collapsed right on top on all of my pursuers.

"I got the timing exactly right, so it just fell on top of them with a huge explosion and took them all out.

"There's all the grappling hook-related stuff as well, like if there's a sniper up on a tower and you pull him down, I actually try to save them before they hit the ground. I dual-hook them as they're falling through the air, shoot it at them and then onto a wall so I can actually catch them in mid-fall."

"There's a lot more stuff to destroy, but there's a balance"



Rico isn't a thinking hero.

That's where I left my cigarette lighter.



08 KILL ZONE

"We really wanted to increase the destructibility from the first game, so there's a lot more stuff to destroy, but there's also a balance. If you make everything destructible, like the buildings as well, then it takes a toll on how detailed stuff can be and it eats up memory and CPU power as well, so it's a balance that we have to strike.

"I mean, what do you as a player feel the need to destroy, what sort of feels natural to you? If you go down that road, you need to make everything destructible and, once you've taken that decision, it puts a limit on what you can do. It's an important decision and there was a lot of discussion about that. Some places, like the Mile High Club, have missions on them, so even though you might try to destroy it by ramming it with a plane, how would the mission then take place? There's that sort of thing to consider it as well.

"We played around with having multiple hooks, like "We've tethered one guy to that, what happens if you tether another guy to him?" and stuff like that, but if you then multiply it out, "What if you could tether them to that object as well, so that's going in this direction and this is going in another direction..." it becomes a nightmare."

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Winners

TINY COMPO

218: Philip Strait
Winning Ghostbusters

KING OF LETTERS

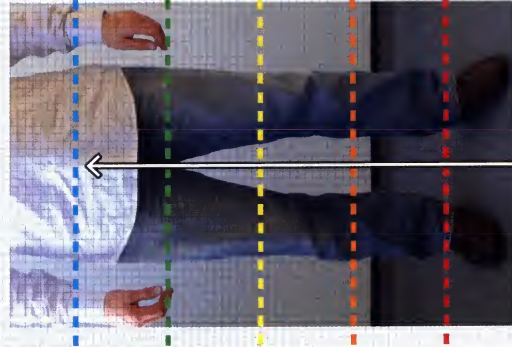
218: Stuart Daglish

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THE PC ZONE TROUSERSOFFOMETER!

There's nothing more exciting than a new computing game hitting the shops. But some games are more exciting than others. That's why gaming magazines invented the Excite Gauge – a way to allow readers to skip all that text and wallow in anticipation. At *PC ZONE*, we're always striving to reflect the levels of raw excitement that threaten our bowels' integrity, but we're often too excited to form sentences. Then we realised that there was a correlation between how excited we were, and how completely we'd removed our trousers. And so, the Trousersoffometer was born – our way of letting you not bother with the shit we write! Here's how it works:



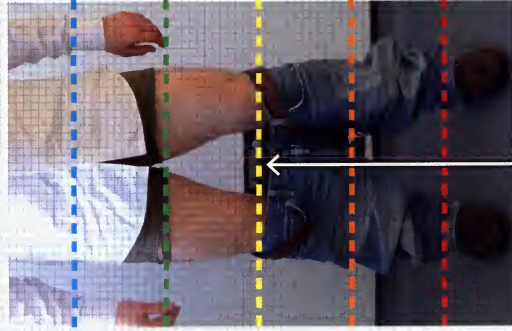
BUCKLED UP

Something has gone seriously wrong. Perhaps we are reacting stand-offishly to some DRM, or perhaps we just haven't got into the office yet. Sometimes you will find our trousers in this position if there's a work experience guy in, because schools make you sign stuff about keeping your trousers on.



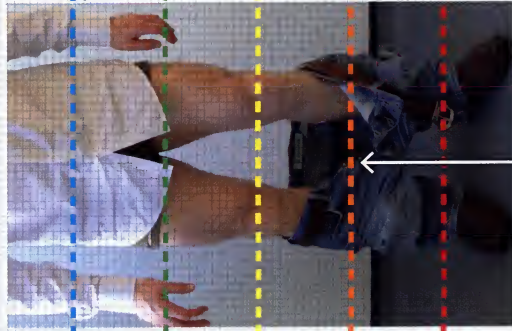
BELTS OFF

This is a game we are seriously thinking about getting excited about. It is a state of excitement that is pregnant with possibilities. Will we end up taking our trousers completely off and whirling them around our heads, as more details are released? Or will we end up sheepishly buttoning up, and admitting we made a mistake?



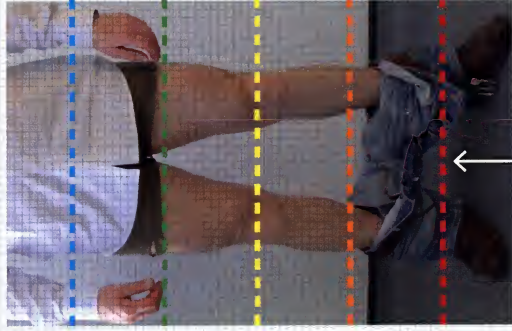
BREATHING ROOM

This is the stage at which we begin to give off the pheromones of excitement, attracting other magazines to come over and undo their trousers. If you want to reproduce this level of zeal at home, it's how far you can take your trousers off while sitting down, and still pull them up in time if you hear your mum on the stairs.



KNEE TREMBLER

Now this is more like it! Chances are, we're shuffling around the office trying to give each other fevered high fives. Sometimes reduced leg mobility might cause us to miss and, being off-balance, it's easy to imagine that we might crash into each other and tumble to the floor, rolling around in wordless excitement until someone goes off.



RIGHT OFF

This level of excitement is usually accompanied with a plaintive howl, as the wait caused by the linear nature of time becomes an unbearable cruelty. Like a grown man dropping his trousers in a shopping centre, there's a tragic beauty to this stage, and it should be used sparingly so as not to cheapen the profoundly layered meaning.

Science suggests there's a level beyond this, where trousers rocket off with considerable force. If you're unlucky enough to be standing upright at the time, the force will be transferred into an upward motion of the body, sending you some feet into the air. Meanwhile your trousers, free of your weight, will begin a squealing journey around the room, the legs tracing a double-helix as they fly out of the window, and into the most beautiful sunset you've ever seen.

Next Month!



ALL POINTS BULLETIN



Massive hands-on with the explosive cops and robbers MMO!



DRM SPECIAL!
HANDS OFF OUR GAMES

How ill-considered DRM will ruin everything for everyone forever.



SUIT UP!
SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION

Sam Fisher sneaks into view – full review next issue!



MANN ALIVE!
KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS

Huge hands-on with IO's gritty, cinematic and violent shooter!



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